

AN ABORIGINAL APPROACH: WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to provide an understanding of what British Columbia K-12 teachers require to successfully teach First Nations students, First Nations content and First Nations culture. This thesis brings awareness of the need to prepare teachers to teach with a holistic pedagogical practice in order to close the achievement gap (Auditor General's Report pg. 3.2015) that presently exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The data collected for the purpose of this thesis was provided through the following; review of the literature, interviews with successful graduates of the University of Northern British Columbia, Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program, and Northern British Columbia Aboriginal School District Principals. The data brings awareness to future teacher preparation to meet the needs of K-12 Aboriginal students that, if followed, will lead to more Aboriginal students meeting success and graduating from the K-12 school system. In conclusion, this thesis provides recommendations that will serve to inform educators.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	5
Chapter One: Introduction.....	6
1.1 Significance of the Research	6
1.2 Purpose of the Study and Research Question	7
1.3 Background of the Study	8
1.4 Researcher Context: Personal Location	9
1.5 Cultural Safety.....	14
1.6 Thesis Overview	16
Chapter Two: Literature Review	18
Introduction	18
2.0 Conceptual Framework.....	19
Spiritual.....	20
Physical	20
Family.	20
Community.	20
2.1 Aboriginal Education: Past	21
2.2 Aboriginal Education: Present.....	30
2.3 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada	39
2.4 First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)	41
2.5 Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement in BC	43
2.6 BC Government Curriculum	46
2.7 Teacher Education Programs with an Aboriginal Approach	48
2.8 Summary	51
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	53
3.1 Research Question	55
3.2 Gathering of Data: Methods	56
3.3 Research participants.....	57
3.4 Aboriginal District Principals	57
3.5 Graduated Students of UNBC B. Ed. Program.....	58
3.6 Interview Questions.....	59

Aboriginal School District Principals (Administrators) Interview Questions	60
Teacher Graduates of the UNBC Education Program (Teachers)	60
3.7 Data Analysis	61
3.8 Conceptual Lens: An Indigenous Approach	61
3.9 Indigenous Research	63
3.10 Limitations and Challenges	66
Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion	69
4.1 Identity	69
4.2 Communication	74
4.3 Connection	78
4.4 Curriculum	82
4.5 Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement and Community Support	88
4.5 Chapter Summary	92
Chapter Five: Conclusion	94
5.1 Summary of Key Findings	95
5.2 Recommendations	96
5.3 Specific Classroom Practices	102
5.4 Words of Wisdom	105
References	107
Appendices	115
Appendix 1	115
Appendix 2	116
Appendix 3	117
Appendix 4: Definitions	118

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Chapter One: Introduction

The purpose of this research is to provide an understanding of what British Columbia (BC) K-12 teachers require to successfully teach First Nations students, First Nations content and First Nations culture. This particular research thesis was conducted with an Indigenous approach to a qualitative method from which I was able to gather data from Northern British Columbia teachers and Aboriginal School District Principals. For the purpose of this study, I will move back and forth between the use of the terms First Nations students and Aboriginal students; I have defined these terms in the Glossary section located in Appendix 4. This first chapter sets the context of the research study in terms of significance, purpose, study background, researcher context, and an overview of the thesis report.

1.1 Significance of the Research

The significance of this particular research study is to not only bring awareness, but to clarify and assist educators to understand the complex issues associated with teaching and learning from the perspective of Aboriginal students in the northern British Columbia K-12 school system. The research data collected and presented throughout this thesis is intended to provide knowledge and context of how pre-service teacher candidates are prepared to educate K-12 students with an emphasis on understanding Aboriginal learner needs. Many perspectives and questions have been explored in this research study that will inform teacher preparation programs and in-service teacher strategies. Based on the data collection and data analysis a discussion of findings leading to several recommendations is presented in Chapter 5. The participant perspectives were provided by several teachers currently in the classroom and three Aboriginal School District Principals in the northern BC K-12 school system. The information learned through the literature and the participant interview contributions provided suggestions

which led to several recommendations regarding the skills and strategies required to implement a pedagogical model of teaching that provides space to embed First Nations content and Aboriginal ways of knowing and cultural experiences into the day to day curricular delivery. My own desire to improve on my Aboriginal teaching and use of resources and pedagogical practice while attempting to inform educators of how they can provide relevant and quality education for all students, especially Aboriginal students, was the driving force behind my desire to explore this topic. It is my personal and professional opinion that Aboriginal education and success for Aboriginal students' should be at the forefront of research. I make note of my worldviews, my career as an educator, and my own position from an Aboriginal heritage as I identify with the scope in which Aboriginal learner needs must be explored within my research topic.

1.2 Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The implementation and embedding of Aboriginal education into the day to day K-12 curriculum is imperative to not only close the student achievement gap, but to also reduce the dropout rates of Aboriginal students in our school system (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016; Hare, 2007, p.51). Aboriginal education has many facets that encompass what it means to include and teach Aboriginal education within the classroom. According to the province of British Columbia, in *Aboriginal World Views and Perspectives in the Classroom*, Aboriginal education is the awareness of the Principals of Learning that supports the well-being of the self, the family, community, the land and the ancestors. Aboriginal education includes characteristics of Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives that emphasize strengths-based, learner centered practice. Overall, Aboriginal education is a holistic approach to learning and knowing that focuses on the relationship we have with ourselves, each other, our environment, and our community (BC Ministry of Education, 2015, p.16). I have taken this research

opportunity to explore if the new curriculum is enough to address Aboriginal learner needs and how pre-service and in-service teachers are prepared or align their teaching practices with the provincially mandated curriculum.

The main research question that guided this study is: Do in-service teachers have an understanding of how to teach First Nations students, First Nations content, and First Nations culture in their classrooms after taking the UNBC teacher education program? From this overall arching question, I created guiding questions to address teacher participant voice and point of view specific to what they had learned while enrolled in the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) Bachelor of Education degree program. In particular, I was interested in determining how they currently use skills and strategies as in-service teachers within their classrooms. I also chose to explore the perspectives of northern British Columbia Aboriginal School District Principals based on their knowledge, vision and overall experience and expectations regarding Aboriginal education in the K-12 school system.

1.3 Background of the Study

I remember when my mother told me about a community curfew that was set and enforced by Indian agents, where Aboriginal people were arrested if caught outside of their community after curfew. She also told me that Aboriginal people could not congregate in groups of more than two in one spot at one time. This is just a brief insight into the ill treatment of First Nations people that was created and enforced through government policy, with what I believe to be the intent for assimilation, or destroying the community mindedness of Aboriginal people at the time.

The Lejac Indian Residential School, located north of Fraser Lake, BC, was established and run by the Catholic Church and the Canadian government (Nadleh Whut'en, 2016). The

school was in operation between 1922 and 1976 with the intent to *educate* the Aboriginal children from northern BC. Aboriginal children and youth were forced to attend, which meant being removed from their local communities. Unfortunately, my mother attended the Lejac Residential School which had an extremely negative impact on her as she progressed into adulthood that led to alcoholism and absenteeism as a parent for which my brothers and I suffered the consequences of the obvious aftermath. I believe it was due to the suffering my mother experienced, resulting from having to leave her family and community to attend the school, that I have become a generational victim of the residential school system. Being able to understand this history and the effects it has had on me has led to my desire to explore this research topic. It is the knowledge and understanding of my culture and background as a First Nations person that guides me as a First Nations elementary school teacher and now completing a Master of Arts (MA) program in First Nations Studies. I strongly believe it is important for Aboriginal people, including myself, to have confidence in one's cultural identity and to have the ability to share one's knowledge and understanding with others.

1.4 Researcher Context: Personal Location

First and most importantly, I want to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh people of where I currently reside. It is culturally appropriate and most respectful that I situate myself within this research due to my First Nations heritage. My name is Beverly Kim Isaac. My birth place was Vanderhoof, British Columbia (BC), but I grew up in the small town of Fraser Lake, BC with my father Helmut Isaac and my mother Mary Jessie Casimel. My mother is a Carrier woman born in Stelat'en First Nations. Introduction of my grandparents is extremely important at this juncture of my thesis, as it further enables me to self-locate and identify with my heritage deeper: my grandparents were Margaret Casimel (maternal

grandmother); Charlie Casimel (maternal grandfather), while my German father was born to Sarah and Jacob Isaac, who originally came from Russia. I am a Dakelh woman and belong to the Frog Clan because of my mother's Stellat'en lineage. I have come to know that my people's history and culture are rich and all-encompassing of who we are and who our children are. As stated by Mitchell (2014):

The clan system continues today in contemporary Stellako society where each member of the Nation belongs to a clan. The clans that comprise Stellat'en society are recognized as: Lhtsehyoo (Frog/Crane); Tsayoo/Lhtsumusyoo (Beaver/Grouse and Owl); Dumt'enyoo (Grizzly Bear/Black Bear/Wolf); and Luksilyoo (Caribou/Little Man). Clans are based on matrilineal ties where a person becomes a member of their mother's clan at the time of birth. Clan membership is permanent and it plays a key role in an individual's life. The clan system creates ties between peoples in the community that are in addition to the bonds they share with family members. The clan system acts like a support network - you are not alone, you have all your whole clan behind you. No Indian person is standing alone. (p.81)

I look at self-locating as an important piece to my study as it shows my connection and passion to this area of education in which I hope to see significant change. Kirby, Grieves and Reid (2006) advocate the ability to know oneself and one's interests in the research topic of exploration in stating:

Our readers have a right to know about us. And they do not want to know whether we played in the high school band. They want to know what prompts our interest in the topic we investigate, to whom we are reporting, and what we personally stand to gain from our study. (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 47)

My father was judged by his family for having children with a First Nations woman, but he was the one who took on the parental role and raised my brothers and me off the reserve. My father was very much aware of the difficulties my brothers and I faced as a result of being associated with very different cultures. From memory, I know my mother lived both on and off the reserve. I struggled to belong to a community as a child and throughout my adolescent years because I was raised off the reserve. I was not accepted by First Nations kids who were raised on the reserve, nor was I accepted by town children because they thought I was Aboriginal and

should live on a reserve. I struggled in school constantly thinking and being given the message that I was not smart enough to succeed. I was always put in alternate classes instead of mainstream classes or sent to work with tutors, which left me to struggle more when I returned to class because of the content I missed. I remember having to attend Carrier language classes up to Grade 7, but was then expected to take French class in Grade 8, but I did not know French and failed the class, which made me feel a failure amongst my peers. I grew up ignorant of my heritage because it was something my parents believed would hinder my education so they chose to not teach me what they knew. It was not until later in life that I started to be involved and experience my Aboriginal culture. My parents and my grandparents eventually informed me of cultural knowledge and ways of knowing through experiencing a rich part of my culture. For example, I learned fragmented pieces of my Carrier language, but was never fluent. I also was involved with attending potlatches, participating in traditional food gathering opportunities, and medicine gathering trips.

It was not until I enrolled in the University of Northern British Columbia Bachelor of Arts program with a major in First Nations Studies that I realized just how much of an identity crisis I was experiencing. I attribute this identity crisis to my experiences within the public education system and a society (Aboriginal and my off the reserve community) that found it difficult to include me. In my recollection, I never saw any First Nations curriculum in my school experience that didn't include a native wearing a head dress or leather regalia as symbolic representation. I was not able to make sense of this representation at the time because I did not and could not identify with it. I did not wear this type of clothing nor did my Mother's people, as part of our culture. Judy Hardes (2013) in *Approaches to Aboriginal Education in Canada* reports systemic barriers First Nations students face in school with a quote that states, "To dance

in two worlds refers to Native people trying to maintain an allegiance to their traditional Native culture while actively participating in the mainstream society to get an education” (As cited in Widowson, p. 249). I knew that once I became a teacher I would be in a better position to guide First Nations children to understand their cultural identity and having the ability to include Aboriginal culture and ways of knowing into curriculum was one tool that I could do this. I continued my educational journey and enrolled into the Master of First Nations Studies program at UNBC. During this time I also was a sessional instructor for the UNBC Bachelor of Education program that enabled me to guide future K-12 teachers. By sharing my personal knowledge of First Nations culture and ways of knowing I was able to guide them on how to incorporate Aboriginal education into their own lesson plans once they become teachers.

I unknowingly made the decision to leave for school, thinking I was just going to get a teaching degree, but it inevitably forged my path towards understanding and reconnecting with my Aboriginal identity, while creating a heartbreaking chain of events that has resulted in my mother not speaking to me, even to this day. I don’t know if she feels I abandoned her or if she has just given up caring? I do know that this treatment she bestows upon me is a result of the past historical trauma she suffered, either through residential school or from her own parents. I do not blame my mother, but I do blame the Lejac Residential School and Canadian government because they forced Aboriginal parents to send their children to these schools. This resulted in children losing their culture and language and even as adults, the lack of ability to raise their own children.

I am passionate about changing and influencing Aboriginal education, as it is imperative to my people and the future of Aboriginal people. I believe it is my responsibility to help and teach knowledge that has been passed down to me by mentors, Elders, friends and ancestors. Jo-

Ann Archibald (2008) reminds me of this responsibility that I must not take for granted. With responsibility comes knowledge and with knowledge comes power. It is my role to reciprocate knowledge in a respectful way as:

If one comes to understand and appreciate the power of a particular knowledge, then one must be ready to share and teach it respectfully and responsibly to others in order for this knowledge, and its power, to continue. One cannot be said to have wisdom until others acknowledge an individual's respectful and responsible use and teaching of knowledge to others. (p.3)

This is a powerful reminder for me as I continue to support teacher candidates and remain in search of better practices, because I understand the need and responsibility to pass on knowledge that has been passed down to me, respectfully. Knowledge is not mine to keep, but to be shared. It is through this study that I present my personal experience both within the K-12 British Columbia (BC) school system and the UNBC Bachelor of Education program from which I graduated in 2012. I placed myself within this research and used my personal and professional experiences to help guide and document the need for a better education system that will meet the needs of the Aboriginal learners. Aboriginal student needs can be better understood through a qualitative study of this nature that uses an Indigenous approach to research that provided stakeholders in the education system space to have their stories told and voices heard.

I am cognizant of our UNBC motto of *En Cha Huna* (University of Northern British Columbia, 2016), which means that all life is respected. It is a teaching that I do not take for granted because it reminds us that all people are valued and respected, despite the fact that we come from many walks of life we recognize diversity and that all have a voice. I am mindful of this important teaching as I continue my educational journey of learning, listening and looking forward to what is most culturally valued.

1.5 Cultural Safety

According to Jessica Ball (2009), cultural safety refers to a situation or experience where someone feels safe and accepted in an environment in spite of who they are or what their culture is. When I use the term *cultural safety* in education I foresee an outcome and that outcome is how students feel after an interaction with others in the school system, during a lesson, and/or their overall day-to-day experiences in school. An educator may be culturally aware, but it does not necessarily mean that a student feels culturally safe within that environment. A good example of this is to imagine a teacher having all the students in the class participate in a classroom potluck and insisting they eat everything, as he/she was taught as a child not to waste food, and not realizing that one of the children is a vegetarian due to religious and cultural reasons. That teacher may have made that student culturally un-safe by unknowingly forcing their own beliefs onto that student regarding a waste not; want not principle. Ball (2009) referred to *cultural un-safety* as a situation where students are marginalized by a dominant culture. Ball created a diagram that explains the five principals of *cultural safety* within the framework of a pot of flowers (see Appendix 3). There are five flowers within the framework with each depicting a principle, which include protocols, personal knowledge, partnerships, process, and positive purpose. The representation of each flower coming out of a pot depicts Indigenous artwork.

Williams (1999) research on cultural safety stated the following:

Cultural safety is an environment which is safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity and truly listening. (p.1)

It is important for teachers to understand *culturally responsive teaching* (Gay, 2010, xxix) and how to create an inclusive classroom, as an educator, and willing to learn and be a part of the solution to close the graduation gap for Aboriginal learners, as well as students of diverse backgrounds. Today's Canadian classrooms are made up of such a diversity of different cultures. It becomes a challenge and great opportunity for the classroom teacher to create an inclusive inquiry based learning environment where students get to share and learn from each other. Teachers can be *culturally responsive* by including the student's realities within the curriculum and lessons that will help the student feel they belong and become more engaged (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching also includes significant new content about how to make instructional delivery more congruent with the cultural orientation of students from different ethnic, racial, social, and linguistic backgrounds (Gay, 2010, p. xxix). Understanding that school is where children come to learn is important, but it is also a major influence of where they learn different social norms and expectations and world views that are unlike their own. An example of understanding the hidden cultural norms is to realize that certain expectations may be unacceptable in a First Nations student's life at home. I was taught by my mother and grandmother that it is considered rude and disrespectful to look your Elders or authoritative figures in the eye. Another example comes from when I took the UNBC education program. There was a time when I was asked to participate in a wheelchair basketball activity to learn what it would be like for a student to be in a wheel chair to better understand them, such as the idea of 'walk a mile in their shoes.' I had to respectfully decline because it is against my culture to participate in such events. In a First Nations culture it is considered disrespectful and dangerous to 'pretend' to be hurt, to sit in a wheel chair, to use crutches, or to even laugh at someone who is hurt, for it will bring bad luck and imminent danger and one could end up in the

situation one was disrespecting. I clearly remember my Grandmother warning me when she caught me playing with crutches; she was very angry and spoke to me in Carrier, my Mother explained that it was against our beliefs, we don't 'tempt' fate or I would end up using them very soon.

These examples of cultural awareness may seem small, but teachers will come to understand that they have a big influence on a student's identity and self-worth within the classroom. If a student feels heard and understood on a deeper level of *cultural responsiveness* from the teacher, that student will have a greater chance to succeed and engage within their education (Williams, 1999, p.1).

I believe many First Nations students in the present day have lost their cultural identity due to the fact that their family members attended Residential Schools as well as having to move away from their communities for work, education and/or a better life. Without guidance and education that is relevant to Aboriginal people and their culture, many students today may face the same struggles of identity loss and confusion without Elders, parents, and teachers stepping in and making a difference in their life. I wholeheartedly believe children must know where they came from in order to go forward in life, without identity, the journey forward is that much more difficult.

1.6 Thesis Overview

The purpose of this research is to provide an understanding of what British Columbia K-12 teachers require to successfully educate First Nations students, First Nations content and First Nations culture. The focus of this study is to identify areas within Aboriginal education that could use improvement by researching literature, conducting interviews and recalling personal experience. The first chapter of this thesis report provides an overview or roadmap that

introduces the research study, the study rationale, while highlighting the study background, research context, and the researcher's personal location.

Chapter Two provides a comprehensive literature review that was used to compare and contrast participant data that is presented in a findings and discussion section in Chapter Four (Findings and Discussion). Before comparison and contrasting of the findings can be done, Chapter Three outlines the methodology and process in which the data was collected, analyzed, and themed as I applied an Indigenous approach to the research study through my Indigenous ways of knowing from my Dakelh heritage.

Chapter Four presents the research findings from the data analysis process and identifies several emerging themes. This chapter was developed by referring to the literature review and its relevance to the emerging themes from the participant data. This allowed me to provide insights and implications based on the data analysis.

Chapter Five delivers several recommendations based on participant interviews, review of the literature, and my personal educational journey from an Aboriginal cultural worldview. Lastly, Chapter Five will also highlight my concluding remarks.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive literature review that is intended to draw upon the scholarly works of Aboriginal, Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers who have vast knowledges and/or experiences in education. It is important to note that many of these scholars have written to the importance of why it is critical for teachers to have an awareness of colonial discourses.

The chapter begins with a piece of my art work that I used as my conceptual framework. In the framework, I have purposefully positioned my principles, *spiritual, physical, family* and *community* to give the reader a sense of my knowing and being. I then go on to discuss Aboriginal education in the past; a time prior to colonization. In this section, traditional ways of knowing and being are highlighted with some examples. Aboriginal education at present is addressed despite the economic and social changes to family values, beliefs and practices. I have also woven my lived experience and stories throughout the chapter as well. The chapter will briefly cover organizations from a provincial body that represents Aboriginal education such as the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). A critical component worth mentioning is the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (AEEA) in British Columbia. However, I will make note that not all school districts have signed off on the agreements. The agreements align with the recent announcement of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada. This then leads into our British Columbia 2016 revised curriculum and what this means for teacher education programs with Aboriginal content embedded. Finally, I conclude by summarizing the chapter.

2.0 Conceptual Framework

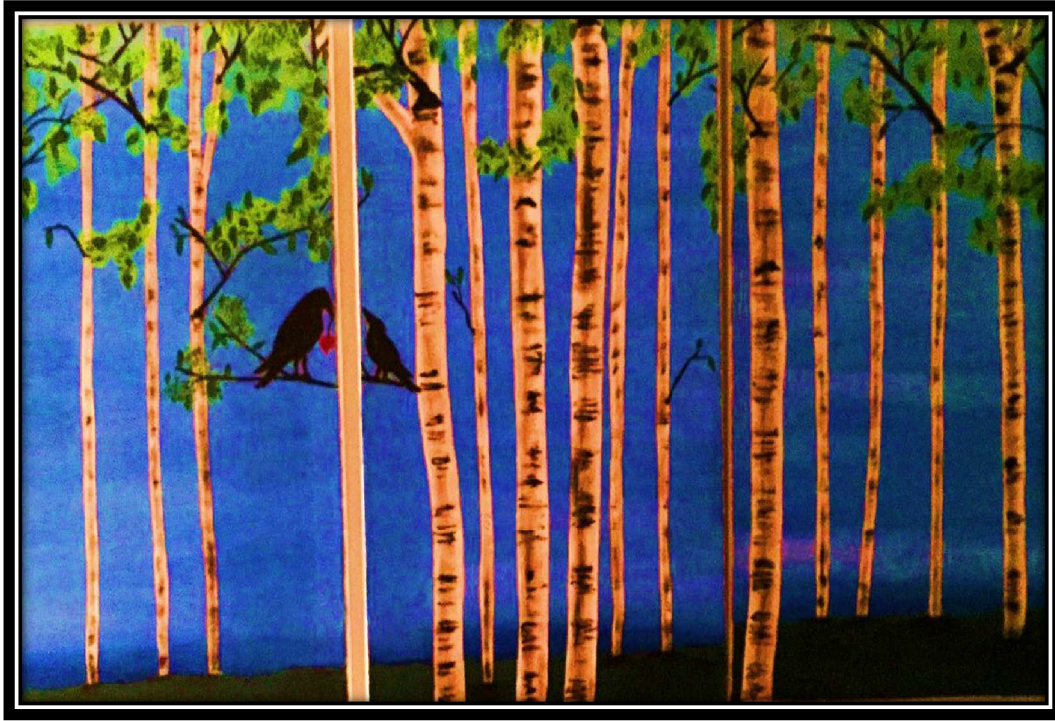


Figure 1: Painting by Beverly Isaac (2015)

The picture above is used as a conceptual framework. The three separate pictures depict the birch trees which represents cultural connections to my people. The bark and sap from the trees are used for making baskets and medicinal use. There are many other creative ways for using bark. The crows personify wisdom, community and family devotion. Both as shown in the picture represent a sense of connection, continuity, collectivity and relationship building. One crow is handing the other a heart on a string – this is important for building strong communities, promoting health, healing and wellness, education and the good care of children, youth, families, and supporting Elders.. The background represents spring and summer for growth, renewal, development, preservation, and sustainability. Within this conceptual framework is the language, a critical piece to communication and community engagement. Below are the four dimensions within my framework broken down into the following sectors: spiritual, physical, family, and community.

Spiritual. I acknowledge that everything is connected and has life, energy, and history imbued with spirit. The birch trees depicted in the picture are not just trees. Below the trees are the roots that continue to grow and the spirit that flows below the roots, throughout and to the top of the tree represents nurture, growth and development. The history of ancestral events that may have taken place around the tree; the stories of old, the songs, prayers, and the dances all play a significant role within spirituality.

Physical. I am the descendent of my ancestors and I am present because they had a purpose in life for me, and that is to prepare, preserve and to present knowledge to the upcoming generation. It is my responsibility to take what I have learned from family, community and the academy to educate, support and to advocate on behalf of learners; politically, socially, and economically.

Family. The crows in the picture play a significant role in my life. As we get older, supposedly we become wiser but there are many facets to the term “wise.” I have taken what I have learned and have and will continue to apply it to higher learning. This however can be a challenge if the family is not included or supportive. As one succeeds within a family, so will the rest. Therefore, the success belongs to the collective.

Community. Members within the community have much to offer. I see the Elders and their accumulated knowledge and lived experience playing a pivotal role to cultural identity. Without a community, we lose a sense of place and belonging; therefore, we must be dedicated and committed to community development and revitalization. We have an opportunity to promote health, healing, wellness, wellbeing, and education.

2.1 Aboriginal Education: Past

Historically, First Nations' education included a variety of teaching and learning methods that were not separate entities. As the Elders taught the most valuable lessons, they also learned by engaging and observing children while storytelling. Archibald (2008) a Sto:lo scholar, articulated that "teachings means cultural values, beliefs, lessons, and understandings that are passed from generation to generation" (p.1). This is a reciprocation of knowledge exchange and dissemination.

Mythology also plays a major part in what is contained within stories. It is an indispensable contributor to operant or classical conditioning. For example, the way we react, behave or respond according to what we have been conditioned to believe. Mythology, arguably, can be seen as the oldest form of knowledge transmission used for setting foundations of ancient social structure. For example, an architectural structure may represent a long-house that was used for feasts, potlatches, tribal affairs, ceremonies etc. The structure metaphorically may have representation of carvings that alludes to traditional knowledge, and ancient history. Cajete (1999) highlighted his Pueblo people and ways of knowing and being as:

Myths explain what it means to live in community with one another. They explain human dependence on the natural world and essential relationships that must be maintained therein. Further to that, we explore the life and death matters of human existence and relate such matters to basic origins, causes, or relationships. They reflect on the concerns that are basic and crucial to humans' understanding of themselves. (p. 117)

My knowledge stems from family and student engagement, community events, Elder involvement, and my own lived experience as a practitioner in and out of communities. What is important to note about First Nations traditional education; the children learn best through observations, listening, looking, learning, and then practicing. Similarly, members within communities had special roles and responsibilities that were destined for the younger generation

who were observed by the Elders and/or community. However, these responsibilities were not assigned to just anyone. For the most part, the Elders knew who would be the upcoming fire keepers, medicinal healers, spiritual healers, hereditary chiefs...etc. All members within a family were responsible in some way or another of educating their youth; they learned values, skills, and all knowledge necessary for life (Neegan, 2005, p. 5). Roles and responsibilities are the collective efforts of the whole community and everyone contributed to knowledge, skills and expertise.

According to Archibald (1995), holism was and is the most appropriate method within First Nations education elaborating further, “First Nations people traditionally adopted a holistic approach to education, Principles of spiritual, physical, and emotional growth, as well as economic and physical survival skills, were developed in each individual to ensure eventual family and village survival” (p. 289). Based on Archibald’s principles, I have adapted a similar conceptual framework based on my personal artwork to highlight my own understanding of holistic education.

I learned from a very young age that everything is connected, when you need to kill an animal for food, that animal will give itself to you if you respect it and respect all of it. The whole animal is used and nothing is wasted, Elders would say that if you waste any part of an animal then you will not be gifted again; if a community contributes to the waste then a community could starve in the winter because the animals have moved on, never to return. We as Aboriginal people are stewards of the land and it is our responsibility to pass on that knowledge to others, in hopes of maintaining our culture and environment for generations to come (Friesen & Friesen, 2002, p. 15).

Archibald (2008) contends that storytelling was a way in which teachings were passed down and how it was a lifelong education for all children to learn from Elders, “Sharing what one has learned is an important Indigenous tradition. This type of sharing can take the form of a story of personal life experience and is done with a compassionate mind and love for others” (p.1). Many stories that Archibald mention, contain life lessons that she came to realize were told for a reason, even within her journey of academia. Those stories helped guide her to see tradition and culture passed down to her for a reason, and that was to learn life. It is within these stories that traditional teachings were used prior to colonization. These stories also helped to inform children to respect – all things that are connected to ways of knowing and being, to reciprocate (gifting back), relevance (cultural understanding), and to be responsible (the way one acts within families or communities), all of which Archibald states as the “four R’s” in higher education. It is the stories that Archibald (2008) was given based on oral delivery and aural reception and was sometimes thought to have implicit meanings, conflicted with the academic literate traditions” (p. 1). Little Bear (2000) argued that in order to understand why different worldviews clash we need to understand how the values, customs, traditions and philosophy differ within each culture (p.77). Much like storytelling, they differ from one household to the next, one community to the next, and one nation to the next and from Indigenous countries to the next.

It is well documented throughout the literature that many Indigenous stories have been lost in translation, eradicated, and this has left a huge gap in traditional and educational practices. Archibald (2008) noted: “Indigenous stories have lost much educational and social value due to colonization, which resulted in weak translations from Aboriginal languages to English, stories shaped to fit Western literate form, and stories adapted to fit a predominantly

Western education system (p. 7). According to Archibald (2008), much of the story has changed so much and without it being told in its original language it also loses some of its intended humour and meaning and is usually misinterpreted.

Watt-Cloutier (1997) in her article *Honoring Our Past, Creating Our Future: Education in Northern and Remote Communities* reminds us of the past and how education prepared people for their future. Holistic educational models infer everything that the student learns and it encompasses the whole of student being. This was how children were taught in the past, teaching took into consideration the whole child and not just parts of his/her life. In order to go back to some aspects of the past and how life was taught, according to Elders. Watt-Cloutier (1997) postulates:

Children do not learn language writing words on a blackboard. They learn it by watching someone do something, like skin a seal. When the child skins a seal, you will begin to see interactive learning... “Traditionally, learning has never been a big mystery to Aboriginal peoples. It is the giving away of our powers and wisdom to the new ways and institutions that has created such confusion, ultimately leading us into the dependence and despair that we are currently experiencing. (p. 127)

An excerpt from King’s (2005) book, *The Truth About Stories*, provided Jeanette Armstrong’s interpretation of what stories mean to her. The quote the best stated how Armstrong viewed the importance of language and the retelling of stories as:

Through my language, I understand I am being spoken to. I’m not the one speaking. The words are coming in many tongues and mouths of Okanagan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the languages, stories and when my words form, I am merely retelling the same story in different patterns.” I see this take on stories as way of explaining how First Nations people view and retell stories that were passed down to them, it is not me who is telling the story but my ancestors and their ancestors, it is in this way that we relearn lessons relevant to us and learn about life and receive the necessary tools to thrive in our communities and beyond. (p. 2)

According to Friesen and Friesen (2002), prior to European contact, the ceremonies, rituals, and observances of the First peoples were premised on spiritual principles (p. 15).

Aboriginal people are sometimes expected to assimilate into Western ideology, in life and especially in the classroom. To look at this topic respectfully means to consider it holistically, looking at the past, the present and the future and including those who have a vested interest, and acknowledging their voice and participation within this study.

Based on the concept of the medicine wheel, traditional education provided a holistic view of life; covering the four directions of the (physical, emotional, spiritual and mental) aspects; the four seasons (winter, spring, summer and fall) and/or the four colors which were often interchangeable depending on location. If you provide and fill each section of your life with health, healing physical, spiritual and mental aspects, you then get a holistic worldview, (Binda, 2001) and this is how education used to look for our children. It is important to note, according to Neeganagwedgin (2011) that “traditionally Aboriginal education did not separate the search for knowledge from learning. Thus, Indigenous knowledges; by their essential nature, embrace the entirety of being and living” (p. 3). Cultural tradition, values and beliefs were passed down through the Elders to the children mostly by example and watching, then by trial and error. Children were taught by community members, extended family and immediate family, so that holistically they learned everything for which the child needed in order to become an independent member. It is important to understand that learning is a continuous process throughout life; traditional education for Aboriginal people was never confined to a classroom with four walls, and that organic learning was the best method for teaching and learning. By following adults and mimicking their everyday activities, children received a holistic education that included respect for the environment, respect for Elders, and most importantly, respect for themselves because they were valued and made to feel like an important part of the community. Learning was an informal, experiential process (Neegan, 2005). Many of the traditional dances,

stories and ceremonies were all inclusive in terms of education and used as tools to teach the young and reaffirm the old. For example, frog, bear, beaver, and caribou personify kinesthetic movements that pertain to their environment; keeping in touch with the rhythm of mother earth, the forest, medicinal plants, ecosystems, the moon, stars and the sun. These are some of many lessons personified through traditional dances, stories and are demonstrated through ceremonies.

A holistic view is an Aboriginal belief that everything is connected and that everything in one's life affects everything else. If we are looking at education, then we also need to look at the rest of the students' life in general. Since I am looking at Aboriginal education then I also need to take into consideration the past history of Aboriginal people in education, the present state of Aboriginal education as well as the future of Aboriginal education, thus taking on a holistic view.

The larger scale within formal schooling of Aboriginal peoples can historically be traced back to the opening of Indian Residential Schools in the early 1800's. The Indian Act of 1876 established that the federal government was in charge of educating Indian children (Friesen & Friesen, 2002, p. 87). The majority of mainstream churches throughout Canada agreed to run these boarding schools for Aboriginal children. Thousands of Aboriginal children were taken from their homes and shipped to these boarding schools where they remained until their sixteenth birthday, or they perished within. After 1920, if parents refused to send their children, they could be charged and sent to jail (Friesen & Friesen, 2002, p.110).

Many people, within the Aboriginal communities themselves along with local communities surrounding the reserves were given false information that these schools were in the best interest of the children and the communities. No one could have predicted the devastation that these schools left behind within individuals, families and communities. Many of

the children who attended these schools faced atrocities such as physical, mental and spiritual abuse at the hands of those who promised to take care of them. There are some reports that students who attended these schools never had a bad experience and feel they were fortunate to have attended, but the same result still happened, their culture, language and identity were stripped away and replaced with Western ideology (Friesen & Friesen, 2002, p.100). In some cases it is states as such in the literature (Armstrong, 2013):

Aboriginal peoples continued, in secret, to speak their own languages and to honour their own ceremonies even when those ceremonies like the potlatch were deemed illegal by the Canadian government. Sometimes, parents left for the bush, taking their children with them as opposed to having their children removed and sent to residential schools, and escaping the prisons ready to engulf them for daring to defy the legislated attendance of their children at those schools. (p. 41)

Most of the schools were not ready or equipped to take on such a task and as a result, many students starved for lack of funding and support by the government. Some residential schools remained open long after the students were being integrated into the public schools. The last school (Gordon Indian Residential School) in Saskatchewan closed in 1996 (Peter Harrison 2011). The cultural and family dynamics that were lost through generations of children that were subjected to these residential and day schools can be still seen today and the aftermath is still apparent with Aboriginal children not knowing their languages, their culture and most of all, their identities. The impact of these schools has only recently been acknowledged by the Canadian Government (Official Apology by Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, June 11, 2008) as:

Two primary objectives of the residential school system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, “to kill the Indian in the child.” Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

It wasn't until Western ideologies and teachings entered into Aboriginal society that Aboriginal people began to feel unimportant and unwanted; this was introduced through Indian Residential Schools. Mainstream education and Western ideology is and has historically been ineffective in terms of educational success for Aboriginal students in Canada. Many children who attended Residential Schools lost their language, family and parenting skills due to the strict regulations of governmental and church run schools. Most were so traumatized, that leading a normal life afterward, was impossible, which led to many self-abusive behaviors, such as alcoholism, drug addictions, mental disorders and so much more. Future generations of the students who attended these schools lost the ability to learn their language, and their cultures, along with parenting skills thus, creating another generation of children without personal identity or skills to raise families. Residential schools became a symbol for Aboriginal people as a place of abuse and loss, preventing many of them from fully embracing education and this again created a generation of poorly educated people. Aboriginal people have long since struggled to be an equal part of society, while still maintaining their cultures, identity and status among non-Aboriginal people (Friesen, & Friesen, 2002, p. 89).

The 1960's brought another wave of devastation for Aboriginal families. The term "Sixties Scoop" was coined by Patrick Johnston, author of the 1983 report "Native Children and the Child Welfare System" (Johnston, 1983, p.1). The child welfare system did not require its workers to be educated in Aboriginal culture, or community life and therefore, workers assumed what they perceived as neglect and felt justified in the removal of the child, when in many cases, this was only a biased Western view of what they thought they perceived. For instance, if social workers did not understand different cultures and did not see full fridges or cupboards of food and only traditional food, such as dried meat or salmon and berries, they deemed this as neglect

and not providing enough food and removed the children without consent or approval.

Thousands of Aboriginal children ended up in the care of non-Aboriginal families, sometimes very far from home and many of the foster or adoptive parents were abusive.

The story of one particular boy named Richard Cardinal was only one example of the life of a child removed during this time. Richard spent his young life in and out of 28 foster homes which led to his suicide at the age of 17 (Obomsawin, 1986). The students that survived the sixties scoop faced the same struggles and setbacks as Residential School survivors, the loss of identity and culture and self-worth. When put into a public education system that did not foster the healing of such traumas. There was a quote from an unknown author saying, “if we do not acknowledge the past, we are doomed to relive it again (n.d).” It is critical for educators, professionals, governments and policy-makers to employ holistic learning for the benefit of children in mainstream schools. With the closure of Residential Schools came integration into public schools. Aboriginal children were put into reserve day schools or local public schools. The only problem with this action was that none of the schools were prepared, nor were parents, communities or Band Chiefs consulted about the integration of these children, again leaving children with no cultural-identity or support to accommodate the culture shock of public schooling (Kirkness, 2013).

In 1969, Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, issued a ‘White Paper’ on Indian policy that recommended the elimination of Indian status (Friesen, Friesen, 2002, p. 90). In turn, this prompted Indian leaders to put forth their own “Red Paper” in 1970, which counteracted the initial ideas and intended policies of the White Paper. In the early 1970’s, the National Indian Brotherhood was established, now known as the Assembly of First Nations. The National Indian Brotherhood first introduced the policy “Indian Control of Indian Education” which is based on

two principals; parental responsibility and local control (Kirkness, 2013). This document was submitted to the Federal government in 1972. Education and control for Aboriginal people was intended to give children the knowledge to understand the world around them and be proud of who they were, something that even today is a struggle to provide and repair from the historical damage done. The National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) spoke to this vision (Battiste, 2013) as stated below:

We want education to provide the setting in which our children can develop the fundamental attitudes and values which have an honoured place in Indian tradition and culture... We want the behavior of our children to be shaped by those values which are most esteemed in our culture... It is important that Indian children have a chance to develop a value which is compatible with Indian culture. (p.62)

This push towards independence from Western control over education was a powerful stance that showed the Canadian government that there were real and legitimate plans for a better future for Aboriginal people and that meant the start was with education.

2.2 Aboriginal Education: Present

Railton (2012) explained the importance of cultural heritage as, “In today’s classroom, cultural heritage is a singular, mainstream commodity” (p. 51). She argues that students learn best through “the social sharing of experience” (p. 51), and that we must draw on each student’s knowledge base, therefore making what they already know more valuable.

Aboriginal education today has come a long way in terms of success and change, but according to many scholars, much is still needed if Canada wants to see Aboriginal educational success and equality within the public school systems. The disconnect that Residential schools left behind have put a burden on our school systems today and unfortunately, we now look to the teachers and administrators as the main sources to fix the problems that so many schools face,

such as the low graduation rates of Aboriginal students. In *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds*, Battiste and Barman (1995) contended the following:

Indian education, although difficult to define, is a significant process to all Aboriginal parents and communities. It firmly raises the issue of humanity; what does it mean to be an Aboriginal person? It addresses the paramount issue of education in a multicultural state: What should education achieve for Aboriginal peoples?" (p. vii)

One solution Battiste offered is self-control of Aboriginal education within Aboriginal communities. She qualified this solution with, "First Nation communities see community-based education as a fundamental responsibility and requirement" (p. vii). Aboriginal education cannot mainly stay in First Nations' communities though and therefore we must educate accordingly, and thus, educating non-Aboriginal teachers successfully is paramount. Teachers are currently challenged with including the Projected Learning Outcomes (PLO) into their everyday lessons. The PLO is a required standard practice, governed by BC provincial policies for teachers. Included in these policies is the implementation of Aboriginal content into the classroom. The difficulty with this policy is the complexities and understanding of how Aboriginal worldviews differ and how teachers can be expected to incorporate this into classroom lessons without a true understanding of Aboriginal worldviews?

There is always the concern that even if non-Aboriginal teacher candidates understand that they need to incorporate Aboriginal content or are at least willing to make it a part of their lessons, it is usually only integrated by occasionally adding an Aboriginal perspective and only when it is convenient and even then it is only a *token amount*. Some teacher candidates may also feel apprehensive teaching Aboriginal education because as non-Aboriginal people, they lack credibility and authority to teach it. From an Aboriginal perspective, some think this is just an excuse to rid them of the responsibility to meaningfully engage with Aboriginal culture and the history of Aboriginal peoples. Resistance to integrate Aboriginal ways of knowing is and can be

simply, not knowing how. One study states “As they enter teaching training, our evaluations revealed that most teacher candidates do not come with prior knowledge about Aboriginal topics, nor do they come with confidence in teaching related material” (Nardozi, 2014, p. 54). According to Hogg (2006) factors that influence achievement in schools are curriculum, teacher experience, teacher preparation, and class size, use of technology and school safety. Teachers with experience are very important for student achievement, but in most cases, minority and low income areas will get the inexperienced teachers with three years or less experience. The Hawthorne Report of 1967, also known as “The White paper”, had a key recommendation that teachers should be encouraged to learn as much as possible about the background and culture of their First Nations students and take the initiative in getting to know individual students (Friesen & Friesen, 2002, p. 90). This is still the message today and continues to be an integral piece of the puzzle when navigating Aboriginal school success strategies.

The British Columbia school system is regulated by the Ministry of Education which provides a regulated numbered set of standards that all certified teachers must abide by. Number six is of particular interest in Aboriginal Education (BC Teachers Regulation Board, 2016) as stated:

Educators have a broad knowledge base and understand the subject areas they teach. Educators understand the curricular, conceptual and methodological foundations of education and of the subject areas they teach. Educators must be able to communicate effectively in English or French. Educators teach students to understand relevant curricula in a Canadian, Aboriginal, and global context. Educators convey the values, beliefs and knowledge of our democratic society. (p. 1)

This particular standard influenced my research topic as it was apparent with teacher candidates in my own cohort were not fully educated in these matters and able to meet this standard had voiced their concerns to me on a regular basis. If the government expects teachers to know and abide by these standards, then it is our duty as teachers to learn how to abide by

them appropriately. It is my hope to make the connection to this standard within the regulations for certified teachers and find out if they understand the depth of expectations within the area of Aboriginal Education within the public schools of British Columbia.

There are some shocking numbers that show just how poorly served Aboriginal students are within the school system. The 2001 census reveals that 42% of the Aboriginal population has less than a secondary school education. This is especially striking since almost half of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 25 years old. Further to this, Gambhir, Broad, Evans and Gaskells (2008) study revealed the federal Auditor General's 2005 report would take 28 years for secondary school graduation rates within the Aboriginal population to equal that of the Canadian average.

I find that the discourse found within the education system can also create negative aspects to Aboriginal education without realizing we are doing so. In the beginning of many studies, the researchers make statements such as "Many of the teacher education programs in the province have taken up the mission to educate teacher candidates about Aboriginal issues and history..." (Nardozi, 2014, p. 54). This brings to question the fact that so called 'Aboriginal issues' are not issues of just Aboriginal people, but all people. When we put it in the context of Aboriginal 'issues', then they become problems for Aboriginal people to solve and no responsibility is put on anyone else. These are Canadian 'issues' and it is up to Canada as a whole to help break the cycle of stereotyping and putting Aboriginal education and people in one neat box of disconnect.

Aboriginal students are not meeting or exceeding their non-Native counterparts in successful graduation rates within Canadian public schools. Mackay and Myles (1989) wrote that there are many factors that play a role in student dropout rates in schools for many are being

of Aboriginal decent. For example, a disconnection to family, community and nation; there are socio-economic factors, social determinants on health, and many other living conditions. Not having a high school diploma can play havoc on one's future success and society is set up only for those that have it. Career choices and moving into post-secondary education are dependent on prior education and high school graduation. The B.C government has a section on their education website for Aboriginal performance data that lists the results of Aboriginal success as of date within public schools in Canada. The *How Are We Doing* (HAWD) report states that in 2013, over 62,000 students self- identified as Aboriginal within the public schools. Approximately sixty percent of Aboriginal students graduate six years after entering Grade 8 compared to their non-Native counterparts with an average of eighty-six percent graduation rate (BC Ministry of Education, 2013).

Battiste (2009) has long been an advocate for change and development of First Nations education asserting, "Aboriginal parents still wish for their children to participate fully in Canadian society but also to develop their personal and community potential through fully actualized linguistic and cultural identity and from within their own Aboriginal context" (p. 192). Schools and teachers need to take this into consideration when teaching First Nations children. The question is and continues to be, how do we teach First Nation students successfully so that everyone is included and taken into consideration within the classroom? Battiste (2009) also makes a good point by noting, that most public schools in Canada today do not have coherent plans about how teachers and students can know Aboriginal thought and apply it in current educational processes. When we consider the classroom today, we can see that the historical ways of how a teacher runs the classroom is still present rather than identifying and teaching to everyone according to their inherent capacities. Battiste stipulated that there are

teachers still dictating what should be learned in the classroom according to the overall expectation of the province which is not based on individual learning. Classrooms are still traditionally set up with students sitting in rows and a teacher stands up front in a symbolic, authoritarian fashion. According to Battiste (2013), the key to designing meaningful education in Canada is to begin confronting the hidden standards of racism, colonialism and cultural and linguistic imperialism. One term to consider to help conceptualize the concept of authority and classification is Meritocracy, which argues that the rewards of schooling and in society go to the *best and the brightest*. Rich and successful people get their powerful positions in society because they are considered to have worked harder and are considered to be smarter than most people.

The purpose of schools is to distribute knowledge to those that are able to use it most effectively in order to contribute to society (Battiste & Barman, 1995). Many public school systems have special education classes and if you were to observe these classes in northern BC in the past, maybe not so much today, but even back when I went to school, you would see the majority of students in these classes were Aboriginal. I remember being put in an accounting class instead of the mainstream math class because no one had the time or patience to help me when I struggled; it was easier to assume Aboriginal students would not leave their communities or be able to learn, so why expect higher standards?

Widdowson and Howard (2013) in *Approaches to Aboriginal Education in Canada: Searching for Solutions*, covered an interesting aspect of Aboriginal education using the term the *cultural discontinuity thesis*, which indicates the failure to recognize Aboriginal culture in the educational system has slowed the pace of integration and maintained the gap between Aboriginal cultures and non-Aboriginal students” (p. xix). I have heard many times from teacher candidates and current teachers, that there just isn’t enough time in a school year to teach First

Nation content, especially if you do not feel adequate enough to do so without making huge mistakes or offending someone. Teachers are under pressure every year to fill their days teaching to the Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLO) set out by the government and trying to play the role of social workers, coat finders, arbitrators, pencil sharpeners, language specialists, walking encyclopedia's, surrogate parents, form fillers, fundraisers, nose wipers, examiners, scapegoats, relations officers, accountants, musicians, artistic directors, petty cash clerks, report writers, and the list goes on.

One underlying response that is a common thread for many teachers teaching in the Canadian public school system is: "Aboriginal people are not the only students in the classroom." I was given this message over and over when I taught in the School of Education at UNBC and found it hard to communicate the importance of including Aboriginal content in the classroom. Many teachers are set with the idea of inclusion for all students in the same manner, and do not realize the importance of educating to the needs of each students' culture. I can understand that classrooms today are diverse and include many students from all walks of life, but I also know that these other cultures are not in jeopardy of being lost, of losing their language and identity. Canada, after all, is home to the original people of this land and if we cannot accept that or teach to that, then all of our efforts will be in vain. Verna St. Dennis (2013) highlighted that the term *multiculturalism* is often the term used within society to identify non-Caucasian people within Canada. Many Aboriginal groups feel that multiculturalism is a form of colonialism and works to distract from the recognition and redress of Indigenous rights. Multiculturalism comes with an understanding that those that fit in this term are immigrants, and Aboriginal people do not apply, they do not share this same commonality and by assuming so erases the specific and unique location of Aboriginal peoples as Indigenous to this land (St

Dennis, 2013). In other words, using this term excludes Aboriginal people and clumps them into *othering* where we do not recognize original occupation of the land.

I have gone through the British Columbia educational system myself and found that it was based and reliant on an outdated system of information. In the past, First Nations education was based on misconstrued information and very little of the actual culture was taught. I know from experience that the education system was flawed and non-supportive for First Nations peoples. When First Nations children were integrated into mainstream classrooms, teachers were neither prepared nor ready to change their way of teaching. The strain between what First Nations children need and what they get within the educational system varies and is disconnected even in the present day school system.

Teachers have a difficult time including Aboriginal content into their class for many reasons. Taylor (1995) mentions the difficulty with finding the appropriate material, and then knowing how to present it, can be challenging for non-Aboriginal teachers. This can vary from community to community. Acceptance from parents and students can depend on the teacher's ability to teach the material and the importance put on students taking autonomy in their own education. Taylor (1995) elaborates further with "students must be allowed to discover their own levels of comfort in dealing with a topic which is essentially about themselves" (as cited in Battiste & Barman, 1995, p. 237).

Battiste (1998) argued there is a need for Aboriginal knowledge and language within the education system and how "the provincial curriculum continues to disinherit Aboriginal language and knowledge by ignoring their value" (p. 17). She highlighted this matter in stating "In schools and universities, traditional academic studies support and reinforce the Eurocentric

contexts and consequences, ignoring Indigenous worldviews, knowledge, and thought, while claiming to have superior grounding in Eurocentric history, literature, and philosophy” (p. 22).

Parent (2014) discussed holistic education from urban Aboriginal youth perspectives. As stated in 2.1, the holistic understanding of healing comes from the understanding that it encompasses spiritual, mental, physical and emotional aspects of an individual’s life that also includes their family, and their community. A reiteration previously stated, “holistic education is rooted in Aboriginal languages, relationships to the land, cultures, and oral traditions” (Friesen & Friesen, 2002, p. 16). “Storytelling and oral transmission is a lifelong experiential process that has and will always be a part of Aboriginal education and it was the task of the Elders who were and are considered significant sources of knowledge” (Parent, 2014, p. 34). Similarly, Aboriginal youth are finding new ways to explore their indigeneity and cultural traditions. The youth interviewed for Parent’s (2014) research affirmed the need for cultural connections and organizations which allowed the youth to maintain reciprocal teaching and learning relationships with staff, Elders, and peers. Part of the pedagogical approach is when the teacher only shares a certain amount of information with learners in order to pique their curiosity. This in turn motivates them to return to learn more. Parent also identifies that “Aboriginal youth in Vancouver are the youngest and fastest growing population in Canada, and over forty thousand Aboriginal people living in Vancouver, 60% of them are under 25 years of age. Parent (2014) suggested we need to look at the bigger picture of where Aboriginal youth are located with 54% of all Canadian Aboriginal peoples living in cities.

Research shows that there is still a large gap between the rates of Aboriginal education success despite the changes in policy. Battiste (2013) identified other areas that showed a clear

need for change such as housing and living conditions in many First Nations communities that impact on Aboriginal people:

...appalling living standards and undermine educational reform; infant mortality rates in these communities are more than doubled compared to non-Aboriginal communities; youth suicide is seven times higher than the average Canadian, and the unemployment rate is three times higher than the Canadian average. The literacy rates are half and most Aboriginal people live below the poverty rate. These conditions have existed for more than fifty years and government policies have failed to correct them. The problems continue to mount, as well as calls for innovative educational reform... (Battiste, p. 63).

MacLean's (2016) latest article on racism in Canada, *Canada's Race Problem: It's Even Worse Than America's* includes a table (appendix 2) that clearly offers the staggering numbers related to lack of equality in Canada when it comes to Aboriginal people. "By almost every measurable indicator, the Aboriginal population in Canada is treated worse and lives with more hardship than the African-American population. All these facts tell us one thing: Canada has a race problem, too" (p. 1).

2.3 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created to provide an avenue for Residential School survivors to have an opportunity to share their stories and begin a journey of healing as a result of those schools. A class-action settlement which was the largest in Canadian history began in 2007 and one of the agreements that came out of that was the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation commission of Canada (Government of Canada, 2016). The idea behind this commission was to facilitate reconciliation between former students, and survivors of the residential schools and the rest of the Canadian population. The Government of Canada (2016) provided some insights to the matter as stated:

Between 2007 and 2015, the Government of Canada provided about \$72 million to support the TRC's work. The TRC spent six years travelling to all parts of Canada and heard from more than 6,500 witnesses. The TRC also hosted seven national events across Canada to engage the Canadian public, educate people about the history and legacy of the residential schools system, and share and honour the experiences of former students and their families. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission created a historical record of the residential schools' system. As part of this process, the Government of Canada provided over five million records to the TRC. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba will house all of the documents collected by the TRC.

In the final report, there are detailed accounts of what happened to the students that attended the residential schools. This included horrendous stories and accounts of the abuse they suffered while attending those schools. It is also within this report that the commission recommended 94 calls to action that are divided into two parts; Legacy and Reconciliation. Within the Legacy section of the final report is a heading 'Education' and within it provides recommendations from numbers 6 to 12. Number 10 of these recommendations states,

We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles (Truth and Reconciliation; Calls to Action, 2016):

- i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.
- ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.
- iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.
- iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
- v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.
- vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.
- vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships. (p. 6)

Within education, it is important to inform students about the history of what happened in Residential Schools. This historical record will help inform Canadians to understand a history that is not apparent to most people within Canada. This document and call to action will

hopefully be taken seriously and be implemented to help close the educational gap. For the purpose of this study the call to action addresses the importance and the need for change within the school systems (Truth and Reconciliation, 2016). The summary of the Truth and Reconciliation report (Honouring the Truth, 2015) discusses what the commission did and how the commission went about collecting information in order to make recommendations. This summary covers the history and legacy which then led to the call to action. This summary also pointed out an important aspect of the creation of it:

...shaming and pointing out wrongdoing were not the purpose of the commission's mandate. Ultimately, the Commission's focus on truth determination was intended to lay the foundation for the important question of reconciliation. Now that we know about residential schools and their legacy, what do we do about it? (p. 8)

2.4 First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)

The First Nation Education Steering Committee (FNESC) is a BC organization dedicated to informing and providing relevant Aboriginal educational direction to teachers and administrators in the province. This organization works to provide informed educational research and guidance relative to achievement indicators for First Nations students. Below I have provided the full scope of how FNESC gives guidance and support to Aboriginal education and how it is clear that all major points are covered in their principles; from their commitment to public education, sincerity, and honesty as important aspects to working with Aboriginal people.

First Nations have created their own schools located within and operated by First Nations communities to adhere to the principles of First Nations control of First Nations education and reflecting a commitment to providing their students locally-based, relevant and high quality educational opportunities. There are 130 First Nations controlled schools in BC which are committed to providing quality instruction, sound academic programs, as well as supportive

environments for children. The schools have been founded upon First Nations cultures and languages and strive to reflect the values and traditions of the communities they serve.

In recognizing approximately two-thirds of First Nations are enrolled in the public education system that fall under the auspice of the BC Ministry of Education. In time, BC First Nations have established respectful and effective working relationships with a range of public education stakeholders resulting in numerous initiatives to support First Nations students. The efforts undertaken in that regard are described in detail in a separate document: *FNESC's Key Accomplishments: Creating Systemic Changes for First Nations Students in the BC Public Education System* (Updated November 26, 2012). FNESC also provides resource binders for teachers. One such resource is “Authentic First Peoples Resources; For Use in K-7 Classrooms” This resource was developed with assistance from the British Columbia Ministry of Education. One identified need was to provide this resource in authentic First Peoples texts which, according to FNESC (2015):

Authentic First Peoples texts are historical or contemporary texts that present their voices and depict themes and issues that are important within First Peoples cultures (e.g., loss of identity and affirmation of identity, tradition, healing, role of family, importance of Elders, connection to the land, the nature and place of spirituality as an aspect of wisdom, the relationships between individual and community, the importance of oral tradition, the experience of colonization and decolonization) also incorporates First Peoples story-telling techniques and features as applicable (p.7).

FNESC confirmed the need for classrooms to have student material that was more reflective of the realities of First Peoples in the province. By creating this resource it helped address the need for a better sense of comfort for students within the classroom hopefully to motivate students to participate more and thus succeed.

Battiste (2009) brings forward an ongoing concern related to Aboriginal epistemology and that is of Eurocentric exploitation. Aboriginal people have been fighting for years to protect

and claim identity that has been lost or stolen, and now with its reintroduction into schools, this knowledge is again being jeopardized by those we trust to teach it “The heritage of Indigenous people is a complete knowledge system with its own concepts of epistemology, philosophy, language, and scientific and logical validity that needs protection from Eurocentric exploitation” (Battiste, 2009, p. 195). While doing this research, I found myself constantly asking: “How do we inform teachers on the cultural lessons that they should be practicing or know?” Can we inform teachers properly in order for them to become trusting allies that can teach authentically and without giving up sacred thought and epistemology, and denigrating it in the process? These are just a few of the challenges schools and universities face when introducing and bringing First Nations educational content into the curriculum.

2.5 Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement in BC

The British Columbia School Act was amended in 1989 with the addition of Section 104 to provide for education agreements. Originally, these agreements meant to address the goals, priorities and the needs of First Nations People with the intention of enhancing educational opportunities for First Nations People (Kavanagh, 1997). The agreements were also a way of providing for a transfer of funding between First Nations and School boards for tuition. In 2006, the Provincial legislature enacted the First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in British Columbia Act, establishing a First Nations Education Authority in the Province, authorizing agreements for Aboriginal communities for jurisdiction over education and effectively nullifying educational provisions in the Indian Act for participating communities. With Aboriginal education in mind, Aboriginal communities in partnership with school districts and the BC Ministry of Education looked at how to enhance Aboriginal education. The following provides a discussion on partnerships (BC Ministry of Education, 2015) in the following statement:

British Columbia schools have not been successful in ensuring that Aboriginal students receive a quality education, one that allows these students to succeed in the larger provincial economy while maintaining ties to their culture. Growing recognition of this problem led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 1999. (p. 1)

We the undersigned, acknowledge that Aboriginal learners are not experiencing school success in British Columbia. We state our intention to work together within the mandates of our respective organizations to improve school success for Aboriginal learners in British Columbia. (p. 1)

The B.C Ministry of Education (2015) stated that an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (AEEA) highlights the following:

...a working agreement between a school district, all local Aboriginal communities, and the Ministry of Education designed to enhance the educational achievement of Aboriginal students. The AEEA establishes a collaborative partnership between Aboriginal communities and school districts that involves shared decision-making and specific goal setting to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal students. AEEA's highlight the importance of academic performance and more importantly, stress the integral nature of Aboriginal traditional culture and languages to Aboriginal student development and success. Fundamental to AEEAs is the requirement that school districts provide strong programs on the culture of local Aboriginal peoples on whose traditional territories the districts are located (para.2).

It is important to know that not all individual Aboriginal communities within BC have signed (AEEA) agreements with their local school districts and many have either signed in the past and just not renewed, or never signed for reasons that were exclusive to those communities.

This topic might be something that is of interest to research since many schools are not represented within the list provided by the BC government. Another important fact that is not included in the reports and lists provided by the government is how the agreements are kept and adhered to within each school district that establishes one. School District # 91 Aboriginal District principal Calvin Desmarais stated that their school district signed one, but it is a document that is not well known by the teachers and is not referenced on a regular basis. It pretty much sits on the wall in a frame for all to see, but unless you are on his team or working with Aboriginal education in particular, this document does not influence your everyday work within education. This begs the question as to how this affects academic success within the

schools that are not fully knowledgeable that these agreements exist. It is difficult to adhere to an agreement if the majority of your staff is unaware that it exists in the first place.

According to the BC Ministry of Education (1999) “Targeted funding provided to boards of education must be spent on provision of Aboriginal education and services. The delivery and outcomes of these programs and services must be documented; preferably through Enhancement Agreements” (p. 1). The ministry outlines that Aboriginal ancestry is documented through the use of a voluntary self-identification.

I remember when I was the Aboriginal Education Worker within Fraser Lake Elementary School, I sat down with the Chief of Stellat'en at the time, which is my community, and we spoke about the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement. Back then, not a lot of people were informed about this document, but I remember the conversation because one thing in particular stood out, that was that Stella'ten at the time was not going to sign the document with the school district. The reasoning behind this was that the Band was under the impression that too many Aboriginal student initiatives were being ignored; one being the success of Aboriginal students. The Stellat'en Band felt their students were still being treated unfairly and not being held to the same standards as the non-Aboriginal students. One practice, in particular, was that at the beginning of the year a school is given an 'x' amount of money for each Aboriginal student enrolled as a Full Time Equivalency fund, but the Band started noticing a trend of suspensions after the funding was allocated. I know this is just the impression of one Band, but it has not been documented. As I researched different School Districts and their Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements, I could not help but notice that many of them have either expired and have not been renewed or some are missing from the list altogether. This is something that could easily be a

separate study, but for now and for the purposes of this study, it is concerning to see the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements are not standard practice for all School Districts.

In terms of the interviews I conducted with the three District Principals of Aboriginal Education, some common themes are linked to this research. I have identified three commonalities, they were once all teachers before coming into these positions, they identify with having to adhere to some form of government policy or curriculum and they all do not have any real relationships with teachers that allow them to influence what is taught in the classroom. When I first started talking to the District Principals, I expected their answers to be similar in the sense that they would talk about their current positions and Aboriginal education. I was wrong, the first interview came in the form of an in depth talk about current positions and what students need in the system, but the second interview came in the form of an autobiography with the interviewee telling me his whole life story. This was very interesting because it gave insight into the study from someone who lived the life of an Aboriginal person within the education system and how he excelled and came to be where he is today. The third interview was about her life but from a non-Aboriginal point of view with an intense need/want to be an Aboriginal ally. Her life brought her full circle to a place that not only helped Aboriginal people but also made positive differences in their lives. All three interviews helped shape my thoughts around what it is they were doing and how were they influencing Aboriginal education today. I found myself thinking about the connection I had with these three as I was an elementary teacher and tried to influence education from the inside out and not within a ‘teaching’ position.

2.6 BC Government Curriculum

A new British Columbia curriculum was released in August 2015 that includes more ideal concepts to make it easier for teachers to include Aboriginal content in their classrooms.

The revised curriculum allows for a more rounded teaching style that helps students focus on their strengths and diverse learning needs. The new curriculum is designed to help teachers create engaging and personalized learning environments for all students. For some Aboriginal educators, this new design resembles a lot of what Aboriginal ways of knowing has been doing for centuries. Armstrong makes it clear in her article that traditional teachings and the community and family mentoring that children received, prior to European contact, included the use of story as a teaching practice, particularly in helping children and youth find their gifts and using them for the good of the community (Armstrong 2013). The new curriculum is more student friendly in that it is learner centered with flexibility and a focus on numeracy and literacy. This way of looking at the teacher learner relationship sees the student as a competent thinker who will become more competent in all areas of his/her life.

Aboriginal culture is very similar in that the children have always been first and foremost at the forefront of community and family life because they are the future. Investing in them means that we invest in ourselves. There are three key features to the new curriculum that, according to the government, contribute to deeper learning. The first is the core competencies which are the intellectual, personal and social skills that students need in order to be successful beyond school. The second is essential learning which represents society's aspirations for educated citizens that develops concepts, skills, and big ideas all of which require higher-order thinking in today's demanding world. The third feature is literacy and numeracy foundations which includes forms of communication such as oral, written, visual, digital, and multimedia that fosters accomplishing of ones' goals. Each of these three features is all based on a *Know-Do-Understand* type model, which is shown in Appendix 2.

2.7 Teacher Education Programs with an Aboriginal Approach

Some universities in Canada offer programs that allow teachers to acquire their teaching degree within Aboriginal traditions and philosophies that guide the curriculum. The University of British Columbia is one such university offering the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP). This program offers both the Elementary and Secondary streams much like the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) with a clear understanding that they prepare students to be effective educators within public, independent and band operated schools. The education council that advises the program is made up of Aboriginal educators, UBC faculty, British Columbia Teacher Federation (BCTF) representative and a Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) student representative. The website for this program identifies it as “a contemporary program with traditional values, Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) truly exemplifies how culture can be integrated within a mainstream post-secondary institution.” The NITEP program is also offered at field Centre’s that allow students to take the program in a non- urban setting in Duncan BC, or in Lillooet BC, with another option being added in 2016 in the Fraser Valley. The idea behind offering these programs elsewhere is to allow students to remain connected to their home and community while obtaining their degree. The program is a 12-month program, which is different from the two-year program at UNBC. The program includes a community field experience (CFE) class indicating that the program includes important connections to the land and communities that are important for teachers within an Aboriginal context.

Following successful completion of a school-based extended practicum, all teacher candidates in the Bachelors of Education (B.Ed.) program participate in EDUC 490, a three-week community field practicum experience. In most cases, the CFE occurs outside of schools in

placements hosted by community partners. Some field experiences take place in a school context that is very different from the extended practicum site, and others take place in locations across the province, country and internationally. During the initial registration process, teacher candidates indicate their preference for a community field experience placement by theme or geographic region. This “non-formal” educational involvement helps teachers develop a broader, more holistic view of education, than in a practicum that is limited to classroom settings. The community field experience is guided by research based on beliefs that teacher candidates, community partners and students all benefit (UBC, 2016).

One teacher has taken a step further and almost by accident, created a way that teacher candidates can indigenize their lessons and curriculum. Helen Armstrong (2013) documented her journey to Indigenize curriculum with the importance of story. Armstrong set out to Indigenize curriculum with the help of colleagues at the university in Brandon, Manitoba, with the hopes that the integration of Aboriginal ways of knowing and being in the world might lead to increased attendance and engagement at school until Aboriginal students reached graduation. The intent was so that Aboriginal students could see their storied lives validated within the school. After grant proposal writing and securing funding and facing many challenges within the system itself, Armstrong was able to integrate indigenization into test schools whom volunteered to try the new approach. She introduced Aboriginal people into the classroom. This was not the first attempt for an idea such as this, but it was what Armstrong discovered later when it seemed their idea was not going to come to fruition and that more lessons can be learned. Armstrong (2013) teaches in the teacher education program in Brandon, Manitoba and felt she made a major breakthrough in indigenizing curriculum as represented in the following quote:

The teacher candidates could create Indigenous Inquiry Kits (IIKs) that would allow them to focus their attention on one ‘doable’ area, either that was of strong individual interest and/or that could be integrated into the classroom during their fall teaching practicum placement. In that way, the teacher candidates, and supervising teachers whom they worked, could immediately see how they could integrate Aboriginal ways of knowing” (Armstrong, 2013, p.52).

Armstrong proceeded to fill up a library with Aboriginal content books that were full of resources for the teacher candidates who were instructed to find a Projected Learning Outcome (PLO) and then a book that they could teach to it. Armstrong admits that this was not wildly successful, and there were many challenges working out the bugs such as not having enough resources. As the years went on, the teacher candidate resource kits grew into not just the inclusion of books, but movies and music and eventually hands on resources as well. The teacher candidates were asked to present their kits to teachers within the schools. They were a huge hit, because they were simple yet included pieces most teachers struggle to be able to do. Armstrong feels she made a full circle in her journey but also knows she has a long way to go before Aboriginal education is the norm and not a side note. “We are travelling full circle, perhaps in concentric circles. And we are finding that the return to indigenous story validates not only our Aboriginal students, but all of us” (Armstrong, 2013, p.60).

Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario offers a program called “Aboriginal Teacher Education Program” offered to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Courses such as social studies, math and physical education offered within this program, all come with an Aboriginal perspective, balancing Aboriginal specific and student centered learning with knowledge of the teaching learning process. This program also offers supervised teaching in a First Nations or provincial school. One thing that these programs have in common is the underlying integration of Aboriginal epistemology and philosophy. Each of these programs is

comparable in terms of the classes provided and they all lead to the completion of a teaching degree. What makes these programs unique is they use Aboriginal content as their prime focus.

2.8 Summary

Chapter two was a comprehensive literature review that drew upon the scholarly works of Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers. The conceptual framework of the research study was based on my own painting to give the reader a sense of connection to family and community. This was briefly depicted in the picture and highlighted through four principles such as spiritual, physical, family and community. The past has much to share and to teach in terms of educating our children today, it is through the lessons of the past that education can succeed in the future. Presently, within Aboriginal education there are some shocking numbers that show just how poorly served Aboriginal students are within the school system and have been for some time. At the same time, Aboriginal students are slowly succeeding but still at a lower rate than their non-Aboriginal peers. Other areas that impact educational success and show a clear need for change are: the housing and living conditions in many First Nations communities continue to have appalling living standards and undermine educational reforms; infant mortality rates in these communities are more than doubled compared to non-Aboriginal communities; youth suicide is seven times higher than the average Canadian; and, the unemployment rate is three times higher than the Canadian average. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was created to provide an avenue for residential school survivors to share their stories and begin a journey of healing. Schools today can make a difference if they understand and revisit Aboriginal Enhancement agreements that were created to improve Aboriginal education. Organizations such as the First Nations Education Steering Committee provide resources for teachers to familiarize themselves with and to get support and ideas on how to include Aboriginal curriculum within

their classrooms. Another key point noted was the importance of understanding that there are post-secondary schools out there with Aboriginal approaches, such as the Native Indian Teacher Education Program. These programs allow teachers in training to learn Aboriginal ways of knowing and have an underlying integration of Aboriginal epistemology and philosophy that is important for today's classroom. Chapter three outline the methodology as a step by step process providing the methods and how the interview participants were engaged.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this Chapter, I will introduce you to the methodology I used while conducting this research to provide an understanding of what British Columbia (BC) K-12 teachers require to successfully teach First Nations students, First Nations content and First Nations culture. I used qualitative research to conduct this study. This is my understanding of what qualitative research means in relation to my research and how it fits. It is through John Creswell (2013) that I learned that as a researcher, you would use qualitative research when there is a problem or issue that needs to be explored and that there are specific characteristics of qualitative research. I have used several such characteristics within my study. The first is multiple methods of qualitative research in which the researcher gathers multiple forms of information, such as interviews, observations and documents rather than using information from one single data source. In my study I used interviews and data gathered from the internet and other literature, as well as relying on my personal information gathered through life within the education system. Another characteristic of a qualitative method allows the researcher to study selected issues, cases, events and the fact that data collection is not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis which is one characteristic that separates qualitative from quantitative research.

I chose a selected issue that I felt was relevant to me and my professional and personal history and views regarding Aboriginal education. Another characteristic of qualitative research is using “reflexivity” in which researchers position themselves within the research, introducing how it informs their interpretation of the information. As an Aboriginal person, I was comfortable situating myself within this research based on my historical experience in the education system. Also, using my current career experience has also put me in the ideal situation to be able to authentically explore this subject. In order to be honest and upfront in my research,

I needed to locate myself and accept the limitations I put on myself and how I feel, as far as the information I found. Since having such a personal history of Aboriginal education and a childhood that was not so positive or educationally rich, and I might add equal, it was difficult to not react to some of the answers given and difficult not to react to some of the research I found on the subject.

I look at self-locating as an important piece to my study; it shows my connection and passion to this area of education in which I hope to see significant change. Creswell asserts that the readers want to know what prompts our interest in the topic we investigate, to whom we are reporting, and what we personally stand to gain from our study (Creswell, 2013, p.47). Kirby, Greaves and Reid stated that “qualitative methodologies embrace the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions. This kind of research occurs in natural settings (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006, p. 12).

Margaret Kovach’s (2009) work on Indigenous methodologies is important for any Indigenous person doing a study using qualitative research. In Chapter six, *Situating Self, Culture, and Purpose in Indigenous Inquiry*, Kovach introduces a key factor on Indigenous Inquiry through self-location and the importance of the questions we ask and how we go about asking questions. Many of us pursue knowledge in relation to our needs and desire for that knowledge. Kovach stipulates the notion that self-location anchors knowledge within experiences which greatly influences interpretation as Indigenous inquiry. She reinforces the act of sharing stories and finding commonalities that assists in making sense of a particular phenomenon. My research into the subject of Aboriginal education in Canada looks into the experiences of both teachers and Aboriginal District Principals with the hope of finding a

commonality within their experience within Aboriginal education. Margaret Kovach introduces the idea of what qualitative research means and can mean to the public and the researcher. In her book, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristic, Conversations, and Contexts*, Kovach (2009) stated “qualitative research can be any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p.26). I used a qualitative approach that did not focus on quantitative methods because qualitative methods fit my research and it did not require statistics, for which I am not well versed in.

Working with and writing about Aboriginal people is a serious undertaking. Throughout history, Aboriginal people have been left out of the consulting process and outcomes that not only involve them but also involve their wellbeing. When it comes to researching with or about Aboriginal people, there are now safeguards to protect and include communities, such as through the Tri-Council Policy statement. As pointed out in *Experience Research Social Change: Methods Beyond the Mainstream*, research with Aboriginal groups is a partnership requiring consultation (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006). I tried to be inclusive of all voices within this study, taking a holistic view of all the information in order to come to a conclusion. By looking at the whole story of Aboriginal education and students and by including the past, the present and the future, I included the voices that relate to all of these pieces in order to see the whole picture. Patton (1987) states also that a holistic perspective takes in all of the parts and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

3.1 Research Question

This qualitative study looks into some aspects of teaching through the stories and experiences of students who have graduated from the University of Northern British Columbia’s education program. It is these students who graduate to become elementary and secondary

school teachers within our public schools, and it is the same teachers who are expected to deliver Aboriginal education within their classrooms according to the Projected Learning Outcomes set out in the government curriculum. The BC Ministry of Education's (2016) *First Peoples Principles of Learning* reflect first peoples' pedagogies and learning and supports a holistic well-being that includes family, self, land and ancestors.

Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions. Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities. Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge. Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story. Learning involves patience and time. Learning requires exploration of one's identity. Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations (para. 1).

I completed a literature review and interviewed teachers who graduated from the UNBC Bachelor of Education program in hopes of learning what is needed to adequately teach Aboriginal students within the public schools. Three Aboriginal District Principals from three different School Districts in northern BC were given the opportunity to voice their opinion on teacher candidates entering the classroom and current classroom outcomes. The main research question that guided this study is: "Do teachers know how to teach Aboriginal students and Aboriginal content in their classrooms after taking the UNBC teacher education program?"

3.2 Gathering of Data: Methods

I gathered data for this research through interviews and a literature review as well as relying on my own knowledge with this topic. When I started the interviews I did not separate the participants based on groups, I interviewed participants as they were in contact with me and were able to meet to do the interview. Each interview was then sent to a transcriber. I researched many articles within this research subject and used a lot of information found within various web sites. My own history has been woven into this research from ancestral teachings, knowledge I

learned from my parents and grandparents as well as memories retrieved from my own educational journey, which still continues today.

3.3 Research participants

The six in-service teacher participants presently teach in the elementary and secondary school system. The teacher participants represent male and female perspectives along with non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal points of view. The teacher participants' identity and their place of employment have been protected through pseudonyms such as: *Participant 4; Participant 5; Participant 6; Participant 7; Participant 8; and Participant 9*. The three Aboriginal School District Principals specifically asked me to identify their real name and position in the research as, in no particular order: Calvin Desmarais (Nechako Lakes School District # 91); Victor Jim (Prince George School District # 57); and, Patty Kimpton (Quesnel School District # 28).

3.4 Aboriginal District Principals

Aboriginal District Principals advocate for Aboriginal education within the school district they are employed in. The mandate for Aboriginal District Principals is to close the achievement gap and to foster the reemergence of cultural and traditional knowledge within the schools. These principals also advocate for Aboriginal students and work with teachers and communities to enhance Aboriginal education. It is important for the principals to be able to create strong relationships with communities and schools. There has been a barrier for some time between Aboriginal parents and schools and the principals are given the arduous task of bridging those gaps in order for Aboriginal educational success to become a reality. I decided that it was important to hear the voices of the Aboriginal District Principals from Prince George and neighboring school districts, as this is the most likely area that teachers would choose to teach once they received their teaching degrees. I first contacted each school district of the three

Aboriginal District Principals and requested permission from the Superintendents of Education to ask if I could conduct research within their school districts. I gained permission first before contacting the Aboriginal District Principals. I did not interview the Aboriginal District Principals in any particular order, but as they were available. My first interview was with Calvin Desmarais, the District Aboriginal Principal for Nechako Lakes, School District # 91. My second interview was with Victor Jim, the District Aboriginal Principal for School District # 57, in Prince George, BC. The third district Aboriginal Principal I interviewed was Patty Kimpton from Quesnel, School District # 28. The interviews for both Calvin Desmarais and Victor Jim took place in my office, as site they chose that was convenient for them. I interviewed Patty Kimpton in her office in Quesnel, BC, also as chosen by her.

I chose to interview the Aboriginal District Principals because of the questions that arose for me while I was taking the education program and personally knowing that the Aboriginal District Principal's positions existed from when I used to hold a position as an Aboriginal education worker within School District# 91(SD # 91). I remember the frustration I had at the time of my position in SD # 91 on how difficult it was that teachers did not have knowledge of the Aboriginal District Principals and what knowledge they held and guidance they could provide to teachers surrounding Aboriginal education. I wondered if the same connection or disconnection still existed while I was taking the education program which is why I decided it was important to include the Principals within my research.

3.5 Graduated Students of UNBC B. Ed. Program

The students I interviewed for this research have all graduated from the University of Northern British Columbia, with either their elementary or secondary teaching degree. Each of these participants is currently teaching and they are representative of a wide variety of

backgrounds within and about Aboriginal education. The six teachers represent one male elementary teacher, one Aboriginal elementary teacher, three secondary female teachers and one non-Aboriginal female elementary teacher. I initially intended to have the voices of eight teachers represented by four from each of the elementary and the secondary streams. Within each stream, I was hoping to have a balance of Aboriginal, and non-Aboriginal as well as male and female participants. However, due to difficulty finding an exact balance of participants and due to time constraints, I went with what was available.

The teachers are identified by the order of their participation within this study in order to maintain anonymity as promised in the Consent Form. One interview took place in the participant's home, which took a little longer than the others did as it became more social before and after the interview, two teacher candidate interviews took place in their respective schools, which I felt helped them recall more of their skills and tools they currently use to teach Aboriginal students. The rest of the interviews took place in my office at the choice of the participants out of convenience for them. I contacted these students by way of social networking, past cohort connections and putting the call out for participants through the education program at UNBC along with word of mouth. These individuals voiced their experience in the education system as well as their expectations of the education system they are in as: what is expected of them by District Aboriginal Principals and whether or not they feel they have enough knowledge of Aboriginal epistemology of the local Peoples, to teach within BC schools?

3.6 Interview Questions

The interview questions were thoughtfully created to ask relevant questions pertaining to each of the two groups of participants. The questions proposed to the District Principals' allowed them to utilize their knowledge of Aboriginal education along with their vision and involvement

with teachers that are teaching within this field. The questions for the teachers are specific to what they learned while taking the education program at UNBC and how they are using those learned skills now within their classrooms. The interviews allowed for elaboration by both participants and me. Each interview took about an hour to complete. The interview questions are provided below:

Aboriginal School District Principals (Administrators) Interview Questions

- 1) What is your background in First Nations education?
- 2) What is your mandate and expectations of school teachers within the system to know or teach within their classrooms?
- 3) Please describe your working relationship with the teachers within the schools of your district?
- 4) Do you see teachers coming into the field ready to teach First Nation children and content in their classrooms? Why or why not?
- 5) How could this situation be improved?

Teacher Graduates of the UNBC Education Program (Teachers)

- 1) Did you graduate from the University of Northern British Columbia education program?
- 2) Do you currently teach within the British Columbia public school system?
- 3) What is your idea of a teacher who can adequately teach First Nations children and content within their classroom?
- 4) Do you feel you received this skill from the education program at University of Northern British Columbia? Why or why not?
- 5) If you could recommend anything that you feel would be helpful for teachers to know about teaching Aboriginal students and Aboriginal content in their classrooms, what would that be?

I took field notes and used a recording device throughout each interview. It took approximately an hour for each interview. I hired a transcriber for the recorded interviews. I had hoped to be able to give each participant an honorarium for participating in my research, but was unable to secure funding and or scholarships that would have allowed me to do so. Each

participant was provided an information sheet regarding the research as well as the interview questions before the interviews commenced and I gave the Participants a consent form to sign.

3.7 Data Analysis

Once the data was gathered, I read and re-read the interviews before being able to pull out specific themes that the participants discussed consistently in their interviews. Then I compared the outcomes and recommendations presented by the participants with the results from the literature review. I reviewed all of the participant's data as a whole. I did not consider separating the responses into categories such as Aboriginal District Principals and teachers or by ethnicity or location. I looked at them as a community and felt that by looking at them all together, I would see similarities and or the common link of education holding them together. When I approached this data, I saw them coming together with a common goal, for the betterment of Aboriginal education and the sense of community, for not only Aboriginal children but also all children. Judy Atkinson (2001) quoted in Wilsons' book, *Research is Ceremony*, sees Indigenous research as guided by a set of principles, and one of those principals is "A knowledge is consideration of community and the diversity and unique nature that each individual brings to community" (Wilson, 2008, p.59).

3.8 Conceptual Lens: An Indigenous Approach

This research study used a qualitative research approach format through an Indigenous to researching the topic of the skills and strategies teachers need in order to meet Aboriginal student learner needs and the importance of embedding Aboriginal education into the daily curriculum. It is John Creswell that states "one undertakes qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection" (Creswell, 1998, p. 14). Qualitative research is used when there is a problem or issue that needs to be explored and that

there are different characteristics of qualitative research. I have used an Indigenous approach or method that falls under qualitative research methodology to collect information and data in the form of in-service teacher interviews, northern British Columbia K-12 Aboriginal School District Principals' observations and documents found in the literature. An Indigenous Approach is the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge rather than relying of Western theories. The core values and beliefs of Indigenous people, the Dakelh people, from worldviews and ways of knowing are incorporated throughout this research. Within this research, I explain Aboriginal education and the core values that community, ancestors and Elders use to educate and wish to educate students using an Indigenous approach. As an Aboriginal person, I rely on stories to guide my knowledge and it is through the method of storytelling, shared by teachers and District Principals, that I gained more insight into Aboriginal education.

A qualitative method allowed me, the researcher, to study selected issues, cases, and events regarding the need to explore Aboriginal education and Aboriginal learner needs and ways of knowing. I felt this topic was relevant to me and my history as it pertains to the present situation of lower achievement rates of Aboriginal student to non-Aboriginal students resulting in a significantly lower high school graduation rate in the Aboriginal student population compared to the non-Aboriginal success rate (Omand, 2015).

Kirby, Greaves and Reid (2006) stated "qualitative methodologies embrace the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions, this kind of research occurs in natural settings" (p. 12). I was able to glean the importance of the participants' stories of their interactions with students and how they convey those interactions in day to day practice and the meaning they bring from those stories.

Margaret Kovach (2009) has been at the forefront of Indigenous methodologies by introducing her book, *Indigenous Methodologies; Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. She introduced the idea of what qualitative research means and can mean to the public and the researcher themselves. Kovach states: “qualitative research can be any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p. 26). My research into the subject of Aboriginal education in British Columbia K-12 looked into the experiences of both teachers and Aboriginal School District Principals with the intent of determining and reporting about their experience within Aboriginal education using an Indigenous approach.

3.9 Indigenous Research

Within Indigenous research, I identified four researchers that shared common characteristics within the Indigenous research paradigm and my own research. Three of the researchers are Indigenous scholars, but all four of have conducted Indigenous research at one point or another such as: Jo-Ann Archibald, 2007; Shawn Wilson, 2008; Margaret Kovach, 2009; and, Ross Hoffman, 2013. Upon reviewing the authors’ work, I noticed all identify the same methodological characteristics that have been woven into this study. Wilson (2008) explains that a research paradigm is the beliefs that guide our actions as researchers. These beliefs include the way that we view reality (ontology), how we think about or know this reality (epistemology), our ethics and morals, (axiology) and how we go about gaining more knowledge about reality (methodology). I like how Wilson explains these definitions for researchers; it is Wilson who believes that too many people use big language as a way of belittling others. Wilson’s belief makes me think that maybe this is also what happens in schools, that language

plays a big role in how we understand the world we live in and if we as teachers are not using the language students understand, then how can we expect them to succeed?

There are challenges that come with incorporating Indigenous methodologies alongside Western ideology. These scholars pave the way for researchers like me who also come across challenging expectations within research practice, such as the use of language. Deloria (1999) explains it as “Within an Indigenous research context; the result has been an attempt to weld Indigenous research to existing bodies of Western knowledge, resulting in confused efforts and methodological floundering” (as cited in Kovach, 2009, p. 36). One challenging aspect was within methodologies itself, I continually asked myself, where is my voice, my story in this and how can I be expected to separate myself from this work? It wasn’t until I read other Indigenous methods that I realized I did not have to. I speak about the four R’s as identified in this study by Verna Kirkness (2013) and I also discovered these four scholars repeating the same message that helped influence my study and reaffirm my thinking. Indigenous research is guided by the four R’s: Reciprocity, Responsibility, Relationship and Respect (Archibald, 2007; Hoffman, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Hoffman explains it well by stating that respect within research is a fundamental principle; responsibility begins with self and extends outward to family, community, nation and the natural world. The reciprocity is through people and the act of giving, either back to your people, to others, or to the natural world (pp. 194-195).

These four researchers also talk about letting participants within research not only share their stories, and how stories are important, but out of respect we allow not only the participants to tell it, but for the reader to take away what they need, it is not up to us as researchers to define that for them (Archibald, 2007; Hoffman, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). I referred to the participants and the importance of their story and how it is told in my own research. Even though

this is an interview, I view their participation within this as telling their experience through stories, what they share with me is in their words and it was important for me not to change or take away from what they had to say. I also found it important for the reader to take away what they needed to learn from the participants' stories. It is within traditional oral stories from our Elders, that we are told the stories that are relevant to our lives at the time, and it is up to us to take away what we need as life lessons, guides or answers to life questions.

Within Indigenous research there is the idea that we have and see in a holistic way and that this can be symbolized within the medicine wheel in many ways through an interrelatedness between *intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical* (Archibald, 2007, p.11) *Spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical*, (Wilson, 2008, p.89), *a body, mind, heart, and spirit*, (Hoffman, 2013, p.191), *metaphysical, pragmatic, language, place, values and relationships*, (Kovach, 2009, p. 57). These representations show how we can and are connected in our lives in our environment and in our minds holistically. The relatedness between them completes and comes full circle when all of these pieces are addressed and doing well because all these parts are considered part of a whole self and are connected. I address this same idea within my study in chapter two within my literature review. My conceptual framework addresses this same idea in terms of looking at my community through the representation of art, the crows, and the trees. It represents a holistic view of my culture and my life through education. I also talk about the need to consider these within education and a student's life. For students to succeed, all of their holistic selves, mind, body, emotions, and spirit, need to be addressed and taken care of in order for them to succeed. If there is disconnect then there is a hole in their wellbeing that needs to be filled, whether it be the mind, the body the spirit or emotion.

When a researcher places themselves within their study allowing for Indigenous research to be authentic and holistic, this is also known as accountability. We are, as Indigenous people expected to be accountable to ourselves and then to others, we share our knowledge and ourselves in good ways in order to teach, to learn and to listen (Archibald, 2007; Hoffman, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). I included my own self within this study to be respectful and responsible to knowledge sharing and my culture. I hope that in being authentic my words can be taken with sincerity and deemed accountable. Kovach (2009) talks about knowing one's own purpose and motivation for research and why it is important and fundamental for research. I am motivated to share who I am and where I come from to validate the importance of my history within Aboriginal education and the knowledge I carry with me that motivates me to continue my educational journey. Wilson (2008) states that Indigenous knowledge is relational and shared with all creation and Archibald says that if you give back what you have learned then it feeds the heart, mind, body and spirit.

3.10 Limitations and Challenges

There were certain challenges that made the process of collecting data for this study difficult throughout the research study. The UNBC Research Ethics Board (REB) put some restrictions on who I could interview and deemed the notion of interviewing my former UNBC Bachelor of Education students as a possible harm because they felt this was a conflict of interest and that I had too much of an authoritative influence on my former students to get honest interview comments. The REB decision limited my ability to find research participants, but in the end I was able to secure six. The REB decision meant that the teachers I interviewed had graduated from the UNBC Bachelor of Education program several years previously, which may

have made it difficult for them to recall specific memories and experiences regarding course work, content and practicum experiences while enrolled in the program.

Another difficult task for teachers was the expectation that they would need to embed Aboriginal education into their lessons as stated in the new BC Ministry of Education Curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). It is my experience and understanding that Aboriginal education can be a sensitive topic for teachers because it contains sensitive topics and cultural views, especially if they never experienced it or are not fully knowledgeable on the topic (Battiste, 2013). Based on the hesitation and inability to discuss certain topics during the interviews, I felt a few of the participants had a difficult time being truly honest about what Aboriginal education looked like while some participants had no problems being forthright in detailing their opinions and view point. I think my being of Aboriginal lineage may have played a role in some of the non-Aboriginal participants' discomfort, especially if they wanted to point out any negative aspect they felt could be disrespectful to me and my culture.

My final challenge I faced was my own bias I brought to the research. I see and continue to see some very negative and disturbing aspects of education in terms of teaching strategies and curricular outcomes that are present in the K-12 system. I found it difficult to not ask my research participants of their experiences in seeing how Aboriginal students' learning needs are not being met and if they thought the new curriculum might address some of the learner needs in terms of Aboriginal education.

Once the interviews were underway, I began to realize I could have formed better questions for the teachers to find answers around how classrooms are structured and could be structured to better suit the needs of a culturally aware teacher. I felt I could have been more

prepared to gather a greater depth of data had I delved further into what the teachers knew about teaching Aboriginal students and what it looked like to be able to embed Aboriginal education into their classroom content and activities. I would have liked to ask them what they thought of their current situations and if they could go back, what would their own learning would have looked like within the education program. I also would have liked to ask if they could re-create the program, with the knowledge they now knew about Aboriginal students and content in the classroom, what would that look like?

I was also challenged with the cultural expectation put on me, as an Aboriginal person, to pay respect to my research participants through an honorarium for their participation. I had originally planned to pay this through grants or scholarship, but was not successful in securing such and could not afford to follow through with the expectation I put on myself in terms of following cultural respect obligations.

I personally have shown reciprocity within this study by sharing my findings with people who wish to learn from it. I hope to show my appreciation for all that I have learned throughout my life to continue learning and sharing with First Nations communities, family and friends and respectfully informing those that are not aware. It is through our Elders and Ancestors that we have learned there is an interrelatedness of our body mind, heart, and spirit, and we are obligated out of respect and accountability to share our knowledge with others. This guides and confirms our purpose within Indigenous research.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

Chapter Four outlines important information obtained from the research Participant interviews regarding their own teaching experiences that novice and experienced teachers can learn from when they are teaching Aboriginal content in their classrooms. It is nearly impossible to capture and include all of the interview information. However, out of respect for the Participants and their voices, I have chosen to present their knowledge and experiences through narrative stories and key interview quotes throughout this chapter to express the essence of their core beliefs in Aboriginal education.

As a reminder, the three Aboriginal School District Principals granted permission to use their real identity, while the remaining Participants (4 – 9) requested the use of a pseudonym throughout. I include their voices in chronological order while allowing each voice to be heard in the same order as they were interviewed. Upon review and analysis of the Participants' information, I discovered four emerging themes identified as: Identity; Communication; Connection; and, Curriculum. The four themes presented below include the Participants' interview statements in a discussion format while connecting their voices back to the literature content presented in Chapter Two.

4.1 Identity

Identity is important to First Nations people because it is who we are as a people and as individuals. I have identified myself as part Aboriginal from my mother's ancestry and understand that First Nations people identify with where we come from and who our ancestors are in order to say, "We belong here" and "we are proud". James Frideres (2008) defined cultural, personal and community identity in terms of where you are, what you believe you are, your community, and your beliefs. Frideres also informs his readers of an external identity that

represents how the outside world views you. In essence, he informs his readers that in Canada First Nations people are among the poorest and at risk of identity loss and there is a need for understanding and acknowledging the historical and ongoing impact of colonialism (as cited in UBC 2016).

The definition of *identity* for some Aboriginal students is explained as what has been passed down through stories, through lineage, or through place names. I know the area that I am from is where my identity begins because I know the territory that my Grandmother and her mother picked berries. I know where my Grandfather hunted and I also visit their gravesites and see all my Ancestors before me by the names on the grave markers. Calvin Desmerais, Aboriginal District Principal for School District 91, expressed the need for students to have a place of belonging to have identity:

Identity is huge, particularly for me. I've heard that there are First Nations kids that don't always necessarily understand their identity. If we can do the things in our school that help with identity, and honour, recognize and give agency to identity. That this is a message in itself to the students, that, I am somebody in the sense that I belong, I belong somewhere.

From my experience, as a teacher, both on call and working within two different school districts, I have seen fewer Aboriginal teachers within public education and even fewer Aboriginal male teachers compared to non-Aboriginal teachers in general. Victor Jim, District Aboriginal Principal for School District # 57, talked about how he, as an Aboriginal male teacher, has helped students identify with him as another Aboriginal person within the classroom and can see themselves in him, which he feels is important:

I think if our kids see I'm a role model for them, and especially if I'm male because a lot of times in our communities there's separation, divorces and, and they have no father figure. Sitting on the board with the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) I've been pushing them to recruit more males because then they play the surrogate father, uncle, or grandfather when they're in the classroom. And it will make a difference for our kids. When I was teaching at home it made a big difference.

Patty Kimpton, an Aboriginal District Principal for School District #27, talks about her identity from an ally's point of view. Patty is non-Aboriginal but has spent the majority of her life working in Aboriginal communities and with Aboriginal people. Patty's interview revealed that identity is important because of how she came to work with Aboriginal people:

I'm the daughter of a logger, faller and we moved all over British Columbia in all different communities and areas as a child. I sometimes lived in reserve settings. I did a teaching degree and was a regular high school teacher, but I always had a focus on Aboriginal kids.

Being a non-Aboriginal teacher who is teaching Aboriginal students can be difficult, because of the different backgrounds, thus different identities. When one of those identities is struggling, this can become even more difficult for trust and relationship building. Patty's words relate to Battiste's (1995) work referring to the idea that *non-Native* teachers can either affirm or help to offset many negative influences that appear in the form of prejudice, stereotypes, and lower standards of living. She advocates that these factors affect students' self-image. Battiste brings awareness to students who will struggle with their identity and need to be supported to ensure they take on a positive identity.

Patty explains the "Connecting the Dots" program created through her school district and her community, along with the Canadian Mental Health Society. Connecting the Dots entailed a survey to identify risk factors and protective factors for youth. Patty referred to the notion of reclaiming traditional and cultural norms through the setting up of traditional cultural camps that are all about Aboriginal people reclaiming their own identity and building their connections, inter-generationally with their youth, as well as with the non-Aboriginal community that was

involved. Patty's belief, as an educator, is that *kids* get the best service from education when they are treated equal. She expects teachers to get the same results from all students and create inclusivity despite their differences.

Participant 5 is currently an elementary teacher who spoke of how identity should not play a role in how a teacher teaches children. She believes, as a non-Aboriginal teacher, she has the skills to teach Aboriginal students. She believed First Nations children may have learned differently a few decades ago, but she does not believe that is true at the present time. She revealed she taught at a school that had a really close connection with the local reserve and those children had much lower reading levels, and much more tumultuous lives. The only difference she noticed between a First Nations student and a Caucasian student is that the Aboriginal student may be a little bit more kinesthetic.

Participant 5 also referred to the revised B.C curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015) core competencies of *Positive Personal & Cultural Identity* where students are taught awareness, understanding, and appreciation of all the facets that contribute to a healthy sense of oneself that includes family background, heritage language, beliefs and perspectives on society. She described how *Identity* is embedded in the newly revised British Columbian school curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2017) and there is an expectation that teachers create projects for all students to connect with their identity as an awareness of "who I am, where do I come from". Which is similar and related to what Calvin reiterated earlier as important for student's to feel like they belong.

Participant 8 is an online high school teacher who shared her new found Aboriginal identity and how difficult it was for her to find out about her past and how it was difficult talking about it with her Grandmother. She grew up totally removed from what little First Nations background she had as a Lakota (Sioux):

I was digging through some old boxes of my grandmother's and I found documents and she promptly took the documentation and said we don't talk about that.

When it came to knowing if Participant 8's students were Aboriginal, she stated that the parents or guardians would inform her of their ancestral identity. She shared an example of how identity can be misrepresented and become a hindrance in terms of her trying to help students. In some cases barriers were embedded from the historical treatment of Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people. In a physical classroom, she was told by students, "You're not going to listen to me because you are white"..... which prompted her to continue to ask herself, how do you build the trust, how do you restore some of the trust at least on a personal basis with students? For her, identity was assumed at the outset by her appearance and became a barrier to helping Aboriginal students. Participant 8 understands a little bit more what the Residential School history has left behind for Aboriginal students as reiterated through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Truth and Reconciliation, 2016).

Being a Status First Nation's person means you are a member of a First Nations Band and registered under the Canadian Government's Indian Act (Government of Canada, 2016). As a high school teacher, similar to Participant 8, Participant 9 recalled students identifying as Status or as Aboriginal, that 80% of the students she worked with were Aboriginal, but not all of them identified as Status, but they did identify as Aboriginal. Widdowson and Howard (2013) addressed through the need for teachers to become cultural brokers and build on rather than change the cultural dispositions of students. This concept was important for Participant 9 to state

because she also felt that in order to teach Aboriginal students, you need to know who they are in order to do it right. To teach First Nations children you have to have some understanding of where they're coming from, what limitations they have and what extra skills they might bring with them to the classroom.

In conclusion, identity plays a big role in how we teach and how students see themselves within a school setting. Teachers can learn new ways to incorporate lessons that help facilitate a positive self- image for Aboriginal students.

4.2 Communication

It is from my life and educational experiences that I am keenly aware that communication can take on many meanings and it is important in order to do a job well. I believe communication is the key to successful outcomes, whatever they may be. I think being a teacher is all about communicating, informing students of what they need to know in order to move ahead in education. If communication is not done properly, or is missing important pieces, then students suffer by being misinformed. The history of Aboriginal people and the history of residential schools and what really happened was not public knowledge for many years. This was due to a lack of communication to the wider public on how the government hurt Aboriginal people in many ways. The various levels of hurt that has impacted Aboriginal people, explains why many became troubled, lost their culture, lost their cultural identity and were considered as failures by many in society (Friesen & Friesen, 2002). These authors make note that communication came in the form spirituality, oral stories and teachings handed down, through our Elders and generations of Ancestors. There is bound to be miscommunication when two different cultures are attempting to communicate, due to language differences, cultural differences and differences of opinions. The research participants have expressed these thoughts

in their interview sessions. I also include my own thoughts because of my cultural background and educational experiences.

Through my educational experience I have found that since many of the school districts in Northern B.C are located within a number of different Band territories it makes it difficult for teachers and administrators to consult with everyone. Many different communities have different needs and wants so School District Principals are faced with challenges of inclusion in decision making and collaboration. Calvin's position as an Aboriginal District Principal provided experience and knowledge to discuss how communication between different groups is integral to public education and how important it is to connect them to each other for the benefit of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement between the district and the local Aboriginal communities. Calvin stated that 9 of the 13 First Nations met with Chief and Councils as well as the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees Chair. This has rekindled the strong relationship between the First Nations communities and the school district. Calvin stressed the communication that was there and the group was able to complete a working draft of a new Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement in two meetings. The Agreement will go out to all of the First Nations and their education departments to be shared with the communities in the next year. I think one of the vital things that Calvin said in his interview is that there is more openness by teachers; both veterans and new, they want to learn and understand so they can better teacher Aboriginal students.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Government of Canada, 2016) interviewed and shared many stories from victims about their experiences within Residential Schools which resonates with Victor Jim's interview. Victor opened up about communicating in the form of understanding, listening to the people that shared their stories about Residential School and how

important it is for everyone; especially teachers. Victor informed me he attended the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearing in Prince George and was in tears. A quote that came from his interview resonates with me in my belief that communication is the key to successful outcomes. He stated: “Teachers need to know about everything that happened to our kids while they were in these Residential Schools. Only then will teachers have a better idea of what kids are bringing to the school, why they behave differently.”

The Truth and Reconciliation is becoming the catalyst for change, through the recommendations it communicates the survivors stories. Many feel that having survivors tell their story and then following up with 94 recommendations by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been historically life changing and seems to be the communication vehicle for much needed change in Canada. Patty shared her thoughts on the importance of hearing about Residential School stories and the importance of communication. She also stated her belief, that with communication, the ability to listen is very important when people are sharing their history with her.

Teachers have brought back cultural teaching in small ways, such as the Restorative Justice Circles. I have seen how circles were implemented in some schools as way of communicating and dealing with issues, or students who needed extra guidance. Within holistic health and healing, a restorative circle respectfully addresses issues culturally (Neeganagwedgin, 2011). Participant 4 is an Aboriginal Elementary teacher. She shared a story about how her school dealt with an issue using a Restorative Justice Circle. She explained that a restorative circle was set in place for an Elder and a co-worker to discuss the problem they were experiencing. In the end, it was revealed that miscommunication was the culprit. These circles also help administration when dealing with students. Instead of suspending a student or

punishing a student, the circles are meant to reconnect everyone back to traditional ways and deal with the situation in a more respectful manner and put the student onto the right path (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel. 2010).

As mentioned earlier in this section, communication can be done in various forms. Participant 8 revealed the importance of bringing in an Aboriginal Education Worker into the teaching programs to communicate to teachers that they are there to help. Communicating the fact that these Aboriginal Education Workers exist is the first step. Having advocates in the schools is beneficial, especially if they are Aboriginal, because communication can be better delivered to parents, to students and to teachers themselves by someone who knows the culture and can communicate in both worlds.

Overall, communication can be used for many outcomes, but when it comes to teaching students positive, truthful and honest communication is the key to success. All of the participants spoke of communication in different ways and how it helped or hindered their teaching. Whether communicating through restorative circles; that can address it in a holistic fashion, or by utilizing Elders and education workers that have the knowledge to communicate to students, it is important to be aware of exactly how you are going to communicate to your students.

Communication in some form or other resonated from the participant interviews with a clear message that communication is important to incorporate in order to adequately teach Aboriginal students and Aboriginal content in their classrooms. In support of this message, some of the participants explained how miscommunication can happen with everyone, what is important is having the tools and understanding to be able to solve problems caused by miscommunication.

4.3 Connection

Connection is important within First Nations culture. Having a connection to the land, to people, to our Ancestors helps strengthen cultural identities (FNESC, 2016). When we make positive connections with others, we make our lives fuller and more meaningful. It is important for teachers to make connections with your students and their parents to be able to successfully teach Aboriginal students. Linda Goulet and Yvonne McLeod (2013), in an article called *Connections and Reconnections: Affirming Cultural Identity in Aboriginal Teacher Education* state that “in any culture, intergenerational connections are a conduit for passing knowledge from one generation to the next, the process needed for cultural retention and renewal” (p. 12). Residential Schools and colonization, with their imposing way of life, were extremely damaging to the Aboriginal people of Canada (Goulet & McLeod, 2013, p.100). The article reveals that the break down in cultural connection and identity contributes to a sense of unimportance, causing personal dislocation and fragmentation within people who suffer this disconnect. From what I have witnessed, with students, not only in public schools but students within post-secondary education as well, is that they feel this disconnect due to loss of identity and connection. One solution to reconnect and find cultural identity is to connect with Elders. It is through Elders that we learn our relationship to the land, which is based on interconnectedness and respect. Goulet and McLeod (2013) point out that it is Elders that speak of the need for connection, the connection of time and place, of past, present, and future. The article also mentions that the Elders encouraged future teachers to make those connections to the land and to the past, for all of the children they would teach in the future. Victor Jim, the Aboriginal District Principal for School District # 57, referred to connections that students make with teachers through the act of caring and love. Jim feels that teachers can attend community events to make connections to get

to know parents and guardians, in order to make a difference in a child's life. Patty Kimpton, the Aboriginal Education District Principal for School District # 28 pointed out that if teachers themselves are not connected then they do not feel part of the team. To remedy this, they developed a blended team where the entire district had responsibility to all students in all areas of the students learning. The students themselves were also placed on blended teams according to their needs. Patty referred to the great connection she feels she has with the local teachers, which helps her tremendously when working with Aboriginal students and their communities. If there is a break in connection with key people and the roles they play for students, then it is the student's success that suffers.

Taylor (1995) suggested that for non-Native teachers it is best to interact and connect to community, which in turn helps define how the community and its students perceive the teacher. By connecting authentically, the student feels respected and important and in turn will show more respect and be able to learn from the non-Native teacher. Sometime connection can come in the form of physical places and their connection to other places. Patty felt that moving the institutions to a more central location would make for more successful learning for students and keeping students connected while Aboriginal students can then have better access to everything. Patty touched on the difference between elementary and secondary schools in terms of teachers being connected with each other. She alluded to the fact that if all teachers were on the same page and connected to work together for the success of each student then the achievement results might improve. Staying connected can be difficult when working in a High School that has hundreds of kids and much more teachers than an elementary school. From experience, it is much easier to stay connected in a smaller environment than a larger one, most of the time due to time constraints.

Participant 4 related the connections she likes to have with her community and Elders when it comes to teaching and how this can improve teacher practice and application of Aboriginal knowledge. She also brought forward the importance of connecting to community and how the UNBC education program could offer a course on the people, the history, community, and territory of the Lheidli T'enneh; considering the Prince George campus is on their territory, at the same time drawing on knowledge holders within the community to assist. In my own experience of working in School District # 91 I was involved in conversations and observations that culminated in a main message of the student benefits of bringing community into the schools. Connection with community members can be your best resource for some of the information you cannot get in your library or textbooks. Connection to your culture is important and Participant 5 felt that the UNBC education program did not necessarily prepare her for the idea that all students were not connected to their communities and culture. For her this was important to know in order to properly teach students. As the interview went on, the discussion moved to how much information was really communicated to her within the UNBC education program and how those connections would have been essential to her success as a teacher. This participant was very passionate about what she learned in the UNBC education program and how she perceived that the message she was given did not correlate back to the classroom. She felt the UNBC program did not inform her of the importance of connecting with the community and how to do that. She recalled focusing on how First Nations community and culture worked, but not content on how to make connections with the community.

Participant 6 understands connections and shared how an Aboriginal Education Worker (Ab. Ed. Worker) was not able to make cultural connections for the teachers that would enable her to help them teach Aboriginal content. He made mention that he thought this inability to connect

with teachers, to make connections, was due to Residential Schools; that this may have impacted the worker's cultural identity and experience. It was powerful for me to hear how a teacher really understood the idea of disconnect to one's culture that the Residential schools created. In his interview he talked about the importance of "...having those connections and conversations, but she wasn't able to bring any heritage or knowledge to the table. I believe her connection was sort of severed by Residential Schools".

Participant 8 concurred with the literature and the other participants regarding the importance of making connections with parents and community. I asked Participant 8 if she thought it would be important making connections to help First Nations children and she felt that teachers need to design curriculum around community connections for learning to be beneficial. Much like what Neegan (2005) referred to in terms of the value of community and what that can bring to a child's identity. Neegan also stated how learning is an informal, experiential process, much like what one would learn through connections within community. Participant 8 explained how exploring the local community by having field trips every two weeks to meet Lheidli T'enneh Elders, or visits to the Prince George Native Friendship Centre would be beneficial. The Native Friendship Centre is a large resource of information and services for people in the city of Prince George with numerous departments meant to help First Nations people with health, education, culture, and employment. I went on a tour of the Centre during my undergraduate years and have been invited to many events held within the Native Friendship Centre that have been integral for connecting to the community of Aboriginal people in Prince George. The need for teachers to connect is important for both students and the teacher: "non-Native teachers will benefit by seeing the community in which they teach as their community; that is, the community in which they live (Taylor, 1995). The Prince George School District Resource Centre (DRC)

has an abundance of Aboriginal education resources that are accessible to all teachers in the district. Participant 8 shared how she connected to the different departments within the Prince George School District # 57. With access to the District Resource Centre and the Aboriginal Education Department for resources that enabled her to be a more successful teacher. It was profound to hear her mention the lack of understanding some teachers, including herself, have in terms of how to connect with Elders respectfully and understand that there might be underlying difficulty because the Elders may have attended Residential Schools. She supported this thought with; “It’s something that’s going to take a lot of time to unravel and it might not be even possible, but the only way to do it is going to be to make meaningful connections to the wider community”. From my own experience of working in School District #91, I realized once teachers have made connections to community and to students, teaching will take on more meaning for them and their understanding toward the students, and their cultural identity can come full circle for both them and the students.

Connection to community and knowing what is important for all students, especially for Aboriginal students, to improve overall student success, is imperative to meet learner needs. I talked about family and connection in Chapter Two through my painting and how important it is for all of those pieces of detail to come together to represent culture; and identity. The crows in my painting represent those connections to community and how children learn their traditional culture.

4.4 Curriculum

The final emerging theme coming from the participant interviews is curriculum. What does curriculum mean in terms of Aboriginal students and Aboriginal content within the classroom? Under the newly revised BC curriculum, one of the ‘Core Competencies’ is

‘communication’, which is relevant to this study because the participants felt that communication was a key component.

Both the literature and the participants speak about curriculum related to this study and the importance of the newly revised BC curriculum. As stated in *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives Into Curricula: A Resource for Curriculum Developers, Teachers, and Administrators* (2003, 2016):

Students are more likely to be interested in learning material if they find it relevant to their lives. Therefore, it is crucial for connections to be made between curricular topics and the real world, particularly the world in which the students find themselves. (p.1)

Many of the interview participants provided comments on how Aboriginal curriculum and content in the classrooms could affect teaching. Some commented on how it was a missing piece for them in the Education program at UNBC. The research participants discussed how the new B.C curriculum expectation concerning changes as to how Aboriginal content will be taught may add more stress to an already hesitant teacher to include it in their classroom. The research participants also mentioned how important it is to have the right kind of content embedded in the curriculum. The participants also expressed that many teachers may not realize the difference between Aboriginal cultures in different geographical areas and that overall they may not see how including Aboriginal content could improve the Aboriginal student success rate. The BC Ministry of Education (2016) revised the curriculum with the expectation that teachers will be more inclusive of Aboriginal content within their lessons. The newly revised BC curriculum (2016) is based on a model where all areas of learning are based on the concepts of “Know-Do-Understanding”. The three elements are; the content (Know), the curricular Competencies (Do), and the Big Ideas (Understand) which all support each other to a deeper understanding. This particular model can be seen in Appendix 1. The newly revised curriculum is important for

Aboriginal people and their future. Teachers are expected to better understand and teach Aboriginal students and content within their classrooms. The following is an excerpt from the BC government web page informing how the new curriculum (B.C Ministry of Education, 2016) will include Aboriginal content:

Many years ago, classroom resources had few references to Aboriginal people or, if they did, it was often superficial or incorrect. As curriculum processes evolved, resources began to include some information about Aboriginal people but not how Aboriginal perspectives and understandings help us learn about the world and how they have contributed to a stronger society. Now, with the education transformation, the province is attempting to embed Aboriginal perspectives into all parts of the curriculum in a meaningful and authentic manner. (p.1)

It is extremely important for Aboriginal children to have the opportunity to learn who they are and where they come from as an inclusive component of their cultural identity. Gardner (1986) stated, “Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him, the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human-being.” He also noted that inclusive curriculum allows Aboriginal children to have a better self- image and contribute to a more positive educational experience (pg.23). We must continue to explore new ideas like we see in the revised curriculum and we will eventually get it right for Aboriginal learners.

Verna Kirkness (2013) identifies the need for an overhaul in the education system that comes from an old colonial phrase that identifies that the three R’s of reading, ‘riting’, and ‘rithmetic’ must be mastered in order to succeed. According to Kirkness, *The Children of the Earth School* in Winnipeg changed these terms to rediscovering (research), respect, and recovering (culture). The Participants have voiced a similar sentiment in terms of culture being important for students. Kirkness also believes that the sharing of knowledge is the key to success if we are to make any kind of educational change for First Nations students. This aligns with the participants’ voices that indicated an importance be placed on communication. She stated, “We

have heard, read and even said many times over the last twenty-five years that quality education for our people must be based on our culture and on our history, yet we continue to base education on white, urban culture and history” (p.21). Much like what the participants shared, in regards to the importance of culture and informing students of the Residential School history in today’s classroom.

Calvin Desmerais, the Aboriginal District Principal for School District # 91 provided his perspective regarding the content of curriculum within his school district and how important the content is for all of the students; “I think the new curriculum is timely because our district has provided a mandate that all teachers need to incorporate Aboriginal content, preferably local, into all areas of teaching.” Calvin mentioned the efforts between the Aboriginal District Principal and the Chiefs and Councils that the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements (AEEA) got developed. He stressed that the curriculum is a big part of the agreements and suggested teachers need to include Aboriginal traditional culture and languages for Aboriginal student development and success. It is Participant 4 who reminds us that when using traditional knowledge in the classroom, teachers should not water down the content or trivialize it in any way. For Participant 4, she knows that when bridging two different types of curriculum, such as Western and Aboriginal, teachers need to be clear as to why they are including it. Much like what Battiste (2009) touched on when she wrote “we need to trust our allies in teaching authentically when introducing new content into the curriculum” (p.195).

Participant 5 spoke of content as being a focus for teachers and revealed her thoughts about knowing the history of Residential Schools and what that would mean for future Aboriginal children and the impact on both teachers and students. She stressed the importance of creating curriculum through an ‘Aboriginal lens’ in order to help correct the educational gap.

Taylor (1995) identified some of the difficulties teachers can have. First, Native content is usually foreign to the non-Native teacher so they must locate and familiarize themselves with the material. Secondly, teachers must decide on an appropriate, effective presentation of content, but a non-Native teacher may not know what is appropriate and what is not. I think many teachers will face the dilemma of limited resources, people and material, when it comes to making these decisions. When I was a Teacher Assistant, now called Education Assistant, I witnessed many seasoned teachers having difficulty changing what or how they taught. I think it is human nature to resist change or admit that what, or how you are teaching, could be improved, but that is exactly what this newly revised B.C curriculum is expecting. The curriculum is attempting to fix something that we know has not been working to date in order to increase Aboriginal student success and close the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Participant 5 acknowledged her frustration with the new curriculum. She expressed that there is a lack of resources and access to resources in order for her to do her job successfully in this statement “the critical piece with curriculum is that First Nations education is woven through everything, to me would be the biggest criticism of the classroom is lack of community connection.” This frustration she feels relates back to the lack of communication and connections in her school community that act as a barrier for her to realize that there are resources and secondly, be informed as to whom she can connect with to access these resources.

Participant 6 reflected on how the new curriculum will address Aboriginal education in a different way from how it was approached in the past. She stated the curriculum no longer is focused only in one grade, but woven through all areas of education. She reminded me that changing the curriculum does not change the teacher and that some teachers may choose not to include Aboriginal content in meaningful ways. She also suggested that some teachers might not

know how to seamlessly blend and embed the content into teaching and curriculum. For her, a lack of meaningful change may affect how children see themselves, “one thing that I’ve noticed from the First Nations children I’ve encountered through the school system so far, is that generally there is a feeling of disenfranchisement because they are seen as outside the system in some way.”

Some would agree that the disenfranchisement of Aboriginal people in the past has contributed to the low socio-economic levels that they face. From experience, these levels can vary within each school and play a big role in how students and teachers alike react or interact. I have been in schools where children from lower income homes are treated differently than their friends because of the clothes they wear or the type of food they bring. Mistreatment of students can occur through ideas and stereotypes taught through hidden curriculum; which is when a student learns outside of the structured classroom (Ghosh, 2010). Hidden curriculum happens in the hallways and in the school yard, and that knowledge is transferred back and forth amongst students without the structure of classroom lessons. Some hidden curriculum can include social norms, racism, and beliefs, which for the most part are unintentional. The hidden curriculum is not always negative. Participant 6 discussed the hidden curriculum as something the students learn that help them when they are in a structured classroom, sometimes without even knowing it. For example, students learn about historical events, such as Residential Schools, from their peers.

Some students have to contend with the emotional negative impact from historical situations such as Residential Schools, and sometimes their present socio economic reality is impacted by that. Through my experience and conversations while teaching, there have been some teachers who feel that Aboriginal children already come with a lot of social and emotional

baggage and introducing possible negative Aboriginal content, such as Residential Schools, may add to the baggage. Friesen and Friesen (2002) would argue against this notion by informing readers that the primary objective for local curriculum development is to provide a means by which Aboriginal students can learn about their historical backgrounds within a school context. These authors believe students can gain a more positive self-image that will give students confidence leading to improved learning. They also note that learning about the historical events may serve to increase awareness and foster a positive attitude toward their cultural affiliation. Participant 7 looks at the new curriculum in terms of using students' knowledge. She provided me with an example of how to make students feel important: "I was teaching in a non-academic program so I would have to pull from what the kids already knew and their prior knowledge....which was more important than what the textbook had to say."

4.5 Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement and Community Support

There were some prevalent topics the Participants discussed that I felt were important to include within this study. The topics included the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP), the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and important documents such as the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (AEEA) that have helped improve or enhance Aboriginal education. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) was the main group identified I think because they play a major role in guiding Aboriginal education. FNESC recently answered the need for providing relevant curriculum to schools that will help enable them to include residential school history to school age children appropriately, in the form of binders for teachers for certain grades (*Retrieved: <http://www.fnesc.ca/irsr/>*). The Native Indian Teacher Education Program, (NITEP) was also identified because of the important role that Native Indian teacher education programs offer to Aboriginal education. I also think

that NITEP and other programs similar in nature can help guide non-Aboriginal teaching programs in terms of what resources can be used and what is important for non-Aboriginal teacher candidates to learn in order to be better teachers in terms of Aboriginal educational expectations.

The final topics that came out of the interviews and literature were agreements made between the provincial government, school districts and local First Nation's communities called Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (AEA). I am familiar with these agreements; they have been in place and part of the government curriculum agenda for as long as I can remember. From my understanding, the problem with the agreements is there is little communication with schools that explains or makes it explicitly clear, that schools have an agreement in place. I learned that the agreements are known amongst the Aboriginal District Principals but not amongst the teachers. I think the reason for this is because it is a part of the Principals mandate and not so much for the teachers. These agreements could be more effective if they were an actual working document that was addressed more often and school personnel were informed about them and worked on their implementation together with the Aboriginal District Principals. Otherwise you have a document that represents something, but does not serve the original purpose it was intended for.

All of these findings can play a big role in how we as teachers are informed and how we successfully teach children in our classrooms. We see those that are tasked with overseeing departments such as Aboriginal education, and are challenged with providing proper education to a large body of teachers that influence how a child is taught and left to ask themselves, did I do enough? Have I provided enough? What can I do more? When all is said and done the main concept taken from this research is, are we doing enough? I think the answer is, no, we are not

doing enough. All of the Participants that were involved in this research identified the same message, that we need to enhance and improve what is already out there and we need to provide better guidance and ways to teach Aboriginal content in the classroom. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission identified within their 94 recommendations that education needs to be a priority and how it is delivered, needs to be an important task (Government of Canada, 2016).

Calvin discussed the local First Nations Education Committee (FNEC) and how this connects to the provincial First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) by working together on the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement (AEEA) within his district. This connection helped decide where to allocate funding that could be integral to professional development for teachers or staff in the area of Aboriginal education. Professional development for staff and teachers happens a few times in the regular scheduled school year. These sessions are usually set up by the Districts and teachers are expected to participate. It is a chance for teachers to come together and share and learn new curriculum, ideas and or lessons with other teachers. Sometimes, according to Calvin, the FNESC group will recommend new teachers being sent to their yearly meetings to learn about what they do and get clarity and advice. I asked Calvin: Do teachers know about the district's FNEC and what you do as a group? His answer was, "No, I wouldn't say they do, we make those connections but broadly speaking I don't think they have an idea".

Each B.C school district is tasked with signing an Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2017), Calvin goes into detail what that means for his district:

An Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement was an initiative of several years ago, it came out of the Provincial Government. The Provincial Government wanted us to

work with the local First Nations to get together to craft a five-year plan to guide Aboriginal education in the district and specific goals are set out and objectives and measurements are all reported on.

Having gone through the UNBC Education program, I did not feel there was a lot of emphasis on these agreements. I only knew about them from my past experience within School District #91 and shared this knowledge with my education program cohort. I think this is important information that teachers in-training and teaching in the schools, would benefit from knowing, because it leads to relationship building with communities. Calvin was aware of the Enhancement Agreements and achievement contracts as being documents that could be important for new teachers to be aware of in this statement:

At our FNEC meetings for the first few years, I would bring up the Enhancement Agreement. I think the trick is, how do you make them into a living document that is in the forefront for teachers' and principals minds throughout the year?

Calvin felt it is important that schools really look at their agreements, not only with communities, but with future teachers. He spoke of living documents such as a policy, an agreement, or a working contract should be reviewed on a regular basis; especially with Enhancement Agreements. Calvin responded to my question pertaining to *achievement contracts* as something that future teachers should be informed of in teaching programs:

I think it's a great idea because it's a mandated from the provincial government that we have to do one. It's a major document that takes a lot of time to do and it's thoughtfully done.

When it came to discussing education programs, Victor was very knowledgeable on one particular program, the Native Indian Teacher Education Program, for which he graduated with his teaching degree from. The NITEP program has been successful in terms of making Aboriginal people feel comfortable leaving their homes and communities to go and get an education; it is culturally based, which also contributes to higher success of its Participants. In terms of other teacher training programs, he said: "I think other education programs should do

the same. Well the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) makes you proud of being Aboriginal; it's no different than any other teaching program". Victor also stressed why it is important that schools and districts make it their goal to hire more administrators and teachers who are Aboriginal.

In conclusion, there were four main themes that came out of interviews with both Aboriginal District Principals and former UNBC education program teachers. The four themes were prevalent in their answers to my questions, when I asked about being an adequate teacher many spoke about communication as being a key component to teaching, and when I asked about skills, it was having connections that were important to obtaining those skills. There were three topics that were also mentioned throughout the interviews that helped shape the suggested recommendations at the end of this research. These topics were characterized as influential within education; both District Principals and teachers identified them as helpful in their quest for resources and guidance to better teach Aboriginal students. These topics were; the (FNESC) First Nations Education Steering Committees, the Aboriginal teaching program NITEP, and the Aboriginal Educational Enhancement Agreements (AEEA).

4.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter covered the key findings of this research that revealed some insightful aspects to consider for educators going into the field of teaching. After reviewing the literature and performing a data analysis of the participant interviews it is evident the areas to be addressed and considered for Aboriginal educational success through four emerging themes as: identity, communication and connection for implementing and embedding Aboriginal content and cultural aspects into practice in our classrooms through the newly revised BC curriculum. The insight and knowledge that each participant shared was very relevant regarding Aboriginal

education and improving the success rates of Aboriginal students through meeting their needs.

The four emerging themes identified through the data analysis are critical for Aboriginal student success leading to the design of the recommendations listed in Chapter Five. All education stakeholders within a school community would benefit from the knowledge gained throughout this research study. There is an organization that can help guide teachers, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). Our teacher education programs in general can also learn from the success of Aboriginal teacher programs, such as the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP). My hope is that this study will help guide teachers to be able to teach Aboriginal content, Aboriginal students and Aboriginal culture within their classrooms more confidently and successfully.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This research provided an understanding of what British Columbia (BC) K-12 teachers required to successfully teach First Nations students, First Nations content and First Nations culture. This particular research thesis was written with an Indigenous approach to a qualitative method from which I was able to gather data from Northern British Columbia teachers and Aboriginal School District Principals.

This study identified dominant themes pulled from interviews with both Aboriginal District Principals and teachers that received their teaching degree from the University of Northern British Columbia that are currently teaching within public education. The four themes identified in the interviews are; identity, communication, connections and curriculum. There are Aboriginal groups that influence education and help support it, such as the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and Aboriginal teaching programs such as NITEP. There are also the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements created between school districts and the local Aboriginal communities within those districts that help guide education.

I was given a document that includes the stories and history of my home community of Stelat'en First Nations. The document contained quotes and stories from my own family members who talk about 'place' and identity. I see the relationship my family had with the land and its people and how community was so important in the past. My great grandfather, Chief Louie, was a great and powerful man, but I know so little of him and his legacy as:

There's a lake named after my grandfather, Chief Louie Lake. Yup, was a lake named after my grandfather and there's a mountain back here named after my grandfather, Mount Chief Louie. I can remember the story behind Mount Chief Louie. They were saying that he was the only one able to climb that mountain because I guess it was so steep. And my grandfather climbed it and ever since then it was known as Mount Chief Louie. As told by my uncle: Andrew Casimel (Mitchell 2014, p.5).

Residential Schools, loss of cultural identity, language and community are all factors in this loss of knowledge being passed down to First Nations people. I know this loss is also the reason that so many other students suffer the same disconnect with their own families, culture and language. My Elders knew how important it was to pass on the knowledge to children and how doing so would keep our culture and ways of knowing alive and help guide future generations “When old people tell stories, it’s night time, at night they tell stories. They tell stories to the little children... got to teach them, just like school, they tell stories. Campfire Site Stories, they call it - maybe to instruct them [about the] way to live. As told by Andrew Casimel (Mitchell 2014).

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

Throughout this research many themes were identified within the literature and the interviews conducted. This research includes literature about Aboriginal education, and many of the authors identified Aboriginal education as ‘in trouble’ and in need of improvement and that Western education and its influence on Aboriginal education has not helped, but rather hindered it. There are many factors to helping a child to succeed in school and one way is helping them feel like they belong, which is one of the themes that came out in this research. ‘Connections’ are a major theme that just about everyone interviewed made reference to.

Connections can be identified in many ways but throughout this research, connections are identified by the teachers as having a connection to the people who will help them become better teachers, by filling in the gap of culture that they need to help Aboriginal students in their schools. It was also discussed that connections come in the form of connecting the students back to their land and culture through curriculum, which will help with cultural identity. The big question remains: How do we do that? One of the interviewees discussed the need to have

connections to Elders, so they in turn can provide their students with that connection. When connecting non-Aboriginal teachers with Elders and knowledge holders, you also need to teach the non-Aboriginal teachers how those connections are made, re-enforced, and respected with the people within the communities.

5.2 Recommendations

This research looked at teacher candidates within the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) School of Education program and asked key questions about their experience as teachers now within the schools and how the program contributed to their learning about Aboriginal students and Aboriginal content. The purpose of interviewing Aboriginal District Principals was to look at what British Columbia schools are looking for in terms of their new teachers coming into the field to teach First Nation students, Aboriginal content and Aboriginal culture. Many of Northern British Columbia's schools are made up a large percentage of First Nation students and statistics show that these First Nation students are not succeeding and graduating at the same rate as their non-Native counterparts. Many Aboriginal children have been undereducated and underfunded within the school systems both on and off reserve. Many students no longer live on the reserves. They are urbanized and their family and community supports have significantly changed. The significance of this study is to bring the importance of Aboriginal education to the forefront of teacher's minds so they can become an informed, reliable teacher in the area of First Nations education.

Some of the recommendations that came out of this research fall within key areas; identity, communication, connections, and curriculum were identified as themes within the literature and interviews. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) plays a big role within Aboriginal education and teachers need to be aware of this resource in order for it to

be influential within education. It can be beneficial to educate everyone on the history and culture of Aboriginal people to help eliminate the stereotypes, and the unfair treatment of many Aboriginal students. Having teachers educated about who and what FNESC is, can be helpful to making one of the connections needed for teachers to improve their curriculum and support for Aboriginal students.

The Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements (AEEA) established a collaborative partnership between Aboriginal communities and school districts that involves shared decision-making and specific goal setting to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal students. It is within these agreements that teachers can start to make a difference, not only getting to know what your schools' agreement is, but being a part of the process of making sure the agreements are used and are living documents. This will also address the part of the connection piece that can connect teachers to communities and local First Nations communities.

Another recommendation that this research identifies is connections. All of the interviewees identified some form of connection that would not only help them in their fields but would help the students that they serve and teach. When we look at the word 'connection', we can see many areas that it covers. Aboriginal people have forever been connected to the land, their people, their language, their culture and amongst themselves. It is only within the last few decades that we have come to acknowledge the influence that Residential Schools and colonialism has had, disconnecting First Nations people from all that is important and supports cultural identity. Students need to feel like they belong and are connected to 'place' and 'people' in order for them to have confidence in who they are and where they will end up in life. History has played a big role in how Aboriginal people view themselves and how they are connected to

the bigger world around them, one that is dominated by Western thought and education.

Valaskakis (2000) writes about this history in stating:

Since the earliest days of non-Native contact, the stories of Aboriginal peoples have been constructed and disseminated by outsiders, for outsiders. These stories are told in cultural narratives embedded in ethnographic studies, paintings and photographs, movies, novels and newspapers, and in radio and television programming that often distort the cultural and political reality of Native culture, heritage and contemporary life through the silence of appropriation of Aboriginal voices. (Valaskakis, 2000, p. 78)

Teachers can make connections to culture and identity for the children in their schools by showing and including Aboriginal people within their curriculum, their teaching displays and within the school in general. By including these key pieces, you are showing your students that they belong, that they have an identity and that you respect and foster inclusion. When students see this, it becomes normalized for them and both First Nations and non-First Nation's students are educated. Connection also means to connect to the community. By doing so you also show that you are welcoming of other cultures, of other ways of life and that you want Aboriginal students to feel included in your classroom. By including community, such as Elders, aunts and uncles, you give students the power to own their identity and be proud of it. Western education has always brought into the classrooms and schools community members, such as police officers, mayors, to name a few. By doing the same but with a sense of culture and inclusion, you include First Nations people who have been forgotten in the past as important connections for the Aboriginal students. The education program could be enhanced by providing connections to resources such as provisions made by FNESC in response to the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations. FNESC provides resources that covers Indian Residential School curriculum, in the form of four texts. The first is "Indian Residential Schools & Reconciliation Teacher Resource Guide Gr.5", Indian Residential Schools & Reconciliation Teacher Resource Guide Gr.10", Indian Residential Schools & Reconciliation Teacher Resource Guide Gr.11/12", and

the Indian Residential Schools & Reconciliation; About the Project”. It is important to remember that any resources provided by FNEESC or any other organizations, are intended and recommended to use with all students of all backgrounds, and not just Aboriginal students. New teachers would benefit from having the knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy and skills in order to differentiate for learners with varied backgrounds, strengths and needs.

As far as connections within the UNBC education program, it is recommended that teacher candidates are given the tools necessary to connect to communities, parents and Elders in order to support and create holistic education in their classrooms. Having the tools to be able to properly connect to these important people is imperative to successful delivery that facilitates inclusion and connections. There is protocol and ways of inviting people into the classroom, inviting an Elder may take a different approach. Communities can inform you that there is protocol in how an Elder is invited, a gift should be presented at the end of their visit out of respect and that gift can be in the form of tobacco or even a card from the students as long as it’s in acknowledgment of the Elder sharing their knowledge. Teacher candidates would benefit from learning these protocols. By connecting and staying connected to community teachers can identify Elders and other knowledge holders that can come into their schools when they have their own classrooms. Being able to make these connections takes time, having patience is key to working and supporting community in the education of Aboriginal children. Battiste (2013) is clearly passionate about Aboriginal education and tells how to incorporate it into education authentically and respectfully:

...educators need to make conscious decisions to nurture indigenous knowledge, dignity, identity, and integrity by making a direct change in school philosophy, pedagogy, and practice. They need to develop missions and purposes that carve out time and space to connect with the wisdom and traditions of Indigenous knowledge. They need to teach holistic and humanistic connections to local and collective relationships. They need to generate educational space that allows them

to be challenging, caring, inspiring and alert to their students' intellectual travails and attuned to their inner conditions. They need to make educational opportunities for students to come together in community with people who bring out their holistic better selves. Only when these changes in thought and behavior are made can we create an educational system that is a place of connectedness and caring, a place that honours the heritage, knowledge, and spirit of every First Nations student. (pp.66-67)

I would also like to include a recommendation for teachers and educators of Aboriginal children that is important to me and that is to keep an open mind and open heart. Children can be sponges of both positive and negative teachings and attitudes, and if we truly want to make a difference in all students' lives, we need to do so because we want to, not because we have to. I leave you with an excerpt from my community's stories; it is about leaving our children with the right knowledge and sharing our ways, and how important it is to do so. It is this message that is apparent throughout Aboriginal communities in that they all have the same ideas and wants for their children, to be able to pass down the knowledge of our ancestors, of our culture and language so as to leave our children with a sense of identity and sense of belonging:

Through the practice of an oral tradition and hands-on teaching, Elders passed on their knowledge and experiences of living off the land to the younger generations. This practice of passing on knowledge about the land and its resources is one that has continued for many generations (Mitchel, 2014 p.61).

I guess I'm the product of my past. In order to be a good functioning human being, you must always speak the truth. Language is used to speak the truth. If you change that in anyway, you're using it for wrong. The whole notion of good, bad, wrong, right, my frame of reference comes from that time, not necessarily schools or [formal] education, it came from them, the people that had a great influence on me. If I have any strength in this world, it came from them (Archie Patrick , Community Chief). (Mitchell, 2014, p.62)

During the interviews, when asked if they would like to recommend anything for the UNBC education program, this was some of the answers from teachers and Aboriginal District Principals whom participated in this research. I would like to include their words because it is

their wisdom that helped guide and enhance my research. They shared their knowledge; it is with respect that I acknowledge their words.

Victor shared the importance of educating the educators in stating:

The more that the administrators and teachers know about our culture, our very rich culture and our history, they would then have a better understanding. They would be more empathetic, more loving, and more caring toward our Aboriginal students.

It has taken many years, but I think school administrators are finally getting the message, that they need to get to know their students, relationship building is important to First Nations people. For Victor, it can be as simple as loving and caring for Aboriginal students, because for him, it comes down to nurturing the student.

Participant 4 shared recommendations she feels would be beneficial to the UNBC Education Program - working with the local Lheidli T'enneh people. From her experience, she knows they would appreciate being involved in education that is happening on their land.

Participant 7 recommended that future teachers should take more First Nations courses before entering into any teaching program, and learning about the territory that you are in is also very important. She also spoke about her experience in the program and how it helped her become a good teacher and she hopes teacher candidates today are able to have the same positive experience.

Participant 5 was passionate about the message teachers need to receive while in the UNBC Education Program. For her, the simple message is that as a teacher you will get different learners and not all Aboriginal students will come knowing their culture. For her this was an important message to tell.

Participant 6 talked about how important it is not to be afraid to make mistakes and to learn from mistakes. I have heard this same message that is taught to students, so it is important to follow our own advice.

Participant 8 knew that the important lesson for future teachers was to have a sensitivity to what happened culturally in the past for First Nations people, the Residential Schools, the 60's scoop and to be comfortable in asking those that do know the history for help, such as Elders.

Participant 9 remarked about how, when she was attending the education program it would have been helpful to have more practicums with Aboriginal students in the classroom. For her, this would have been beneficial to all the future teachers; getting to know First Nations children in a classroom setting.

5.3 Specific Classroom Practices

The following provides suggestions that teachers of any classroom, both within the k-12 school system or teaching programs, can implement into classrooms based on examples from what other teachers are already doing. These suggestions are just examples and the reader needs to take into account that there are endless possibilities that they can take and routes that will lead to successful teaching. Recommendations have already been suggested within this study but teachers also need to consider what the local First Nations communities hope for and suggest as examples of what they want their children learning within the school system.

The talking circle can be a powerful tool for teachers to be able to connect with students. A talking circle can bring students and teachers together in a way that helps solidify cultural identity and be a part of everyday curriculum. Every community and culture that practice talking circles all has their own way of doing them. It is respectful for teachers to look

to the local Elders and community members for direction on how to properly include talking circles in their classrooms.

Another example of a teaching tool could be the talking stick. The talking stick can be any item of importance to the teacher or students. It can be a special rock, an actual stick or a feather. The idea behind implementing a talking stick allows everyone in the classroom to have a voice. The rule is that whoever has the talking stick is the only person who gets to speak, and everyone else needs to respect that and listen to the speaker. The talking stick can be used within a talking circle and each speaker takes their turn and then passes the item to the next person. The implementation of the talking stick helps students become listeners, to be patient, to allow students to have voice and also feel respected when they have their turn to speak.

Teachers can teach collaboratively with other subject areas to integrate First Nations content. This allows teachers to communicate and connect with each other for these lessons. Different departments can come together to teach children within the different subjects areas. For example a cooking class can work together with the math class to follow traditional recipes. Or a teacher can use a moose as an example, deciding how heavy is the moose, how many families would one moose feed? How many different ways can students use each part of the moose, such as drum making and moose hide for clothing? The cooking class can use measurements for cooking moose meat thus integrating math. There are so many different possibilities that classroom teachers can partner with each other to bring in First Nations content.

I am including some suggestions taken from a resource provided to educators in (2006). This book *Shared Learnings: Integrating BC Aboriginal Content K-10* was first introduced to me when I was the Aboriginal education worker within School District 91.

It is a guide for teachers, developed in recognition of the need for classroom material that can help all teachers provide students with knowledge of, and opportunities to share experiences with, BC Aboriginal peoples. (p. 4)

If teachers and educators are not familiar with this book, it can be a good starting point on how to integrate Aboriginal content and pedagogy into their classrooms. It includes how to plan your program and a brief history as well as current introductions to Aboriginal peoples. The book is broken up into instructional strategies for grades k-3, 4-7 and then grades 8-10, covering many, if not all of the subject areas, such as Math, Social Studies and even Physical Education. Each instructional strategy includes the subject areas for which the lesson will be covering, the shared learnings that cover where this is relevant in an Aboriginal person's life or culture, and different ways in which the teacher can integrate this concept into their lesson. Finally, each lesson also includes a list of resources that were created through partnerships between the schools districts and Aboriginal communities. An interesting piece to this book is the inclusion of a "did you know?" section for individual lessons. These are little facts about the subject area and include examples such as famous Aboriginal people and pieces of history about Aboriginal people within this subject area. The lessons also includes a "teaching tip" that could be important for the teacher to know when using or integrating this content into their classroom, for example; "Represent Aboriginal people as appropriate role models with whom children can identify" (p. 24). All of the resources and information sharing found within this book are good examples of what teachers can use within their classrooms to help them integrate Aboriginal content and culture into their daily lessons and programs.

These are just a few examples of how teachers can integrate First Nations content into their classroom. It is important for teachers to gain basic understanding of the local territory and the local culture(s). That can really contribute to how effectively and respectfully a teacher

includes First Nations culture(s) into their teaching practices. Again, Elders and other knowledge holders are the best source of information into the proper ways to be able to teach children the culture. When teachers connect to community and Elders they will find there are endless possibilities for inclusive curriculum implementation.

5.4 Words of Wisdom

Marie Battiste (2013) has been integral to this study; I leave you with some of her powerful insight into Aboriginal education;

White teachers in schools disparage Aboriginal parents in ways that continue to assume that these parents have created their own situations of poverty by their lack of effort, and their alienation and resignation are a result of laziness and other social disorders. In other words, they were the creators of their situation. Their student's resistance to school was their parents fault or the fault of their language or culture. (p. 125)

It is important for educators not to forget the power of their assumptions and lack of knowledge that can potentially hinder education. I hope that this research helps bring some clarity for teachers to better understand Aboriginal students and to be able to confidently bring appropriate Aboriginal content into their classrooms. The interviews with Aboriginal District Principals and former graduated students of the UNBC education program were very helpful in sharing their stories within this research and helping bring more information to this subject. In light of the recently released Truth and Reconciliation Commission Recommendations, Education will be instrumental in assisting in the implementation of the recommendations put forth. Aboriginal children and all children deserve to have the best education possible. The best education can be achieved when educators, community, Elders, and students all work together to achieve that goal, being respectful, authentic and honest. It is through connections, identity, communication and curriculum where we need to focus. I believe we are all unique individuals with a story to tell and it is within these stories that we can see identity, reach each other through

communicating and create those very important connections in a holistic way; the way Indigenous people have been doing since time immemorial.

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Appendices

Appendix 1



Content (Know)

The Content learning standards — the “Know” of the Know-Do-Understand model of learning — detail the essential topics and knowledge at each grade level.

Curricular Competencies (Do)

The Curricular Competencies are the skills, strategies, and processes that students develop over time. They reflect the “Do” in the Know-Do-Understand model of learning. While Curricular Competencies are more subject-specific, they are connected to the Core Competencies.

Big Ideas (Understand)

The Big Ideas consist of generalizations and principles and the key concepts important in an area of learning. They reflect the “Understand” component of the Know-Do-Understand model of learning.

The big ideas represent what students will understand at the completion of the curriculum for their grade. They are intended to endure beyond a single grade and contribute to future understanding

Appendix 2

A national disgrace

By almost every measurable indicator, Canada's Aboriginal population suffers a worse fate and more hardship than the African-American population in the U.S.

	Aboriginal Canadians	African- Americans
Unemployment rate	14%	11%
Unemployment rate vs. the national rate	2.1 times	1.9 times
Median income	\$22,344	\$23,738
Median income vs. the national average	60%	74%
Incarceration rate (per 100,000 population)	1,400	2,207
Incarceration vs. the national rate	10 times	3 times
Homicide rate (per 100,000 population)	8.8	17.3
Homicide rate vs. the national rate	6.1 times	3.7 times
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	11.7	12.4
Infant mortality rate vs. the national rate	2.3 times	2 times
Life expectancy (in years)	72.8	74.9
Life expectancy vs. the national average	91%	95%
Dropout rate*	23%	8%
Dropout rate vs. the national average	2.7 times	1.1 times

*20- to 24-year-olds without a high school diploma, and not in school

MACLEAN'S

Sources: Statistics Canada; Office of the Correctional Investigator; The Lancet; Health Canada; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; U.S. Census Bureau; U.S. Department of Justice; U.S. Department of Health; Centers of Disease Control; National Center for Education Statistics

Appendix 3



Appendix 4: Definitions

Aboriginal- Is of the human race, animals, and plants. Inhabiting or existing in a land from the earliest times or form before the arrival of the colonists; indigenous. (Google Search 2016)

Band- A body of Indians for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or money is held by the Crown, or declared to be a band for the purposes of the *Indian Act*. Each band has its own governing band council, usually consisting of one chief and several councilors. Community members choose the chief and councilors by election, or sometimes through custom. The members of a band generally share common values, traditions and practices rooted in their ancestral heritage. Today, many bands prefer to be known as First Nations. (Government of Canada. 2012)

Cultural Responsiveness- The ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of your own culture as well as people from other cultures (Ontario Schools. 2013)

Cultural safety- Cultural safety was developed as a concept in nursing practice in New Zealand with respect to health care for Maori people. The term refers to the quality of care given to people from different ethnicities and cultures to within the scope of the cultural values and norms of the patient. (Wepa, 2004; Williams, 1999).

Dakelh- People who travel upon water. (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council 2011).

Dakelh Keyoh- Our vast homeland of thousands of lakes and rivers spanning central British Columbia. (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council 2011).

Dogwood Certificate- Granted by the Ministry of education to students who meet the

British Columbia secondary school graduation requirements. (British Columbia Ministry of Education 2016).

First Nations- A term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the word "Indian," which some people found offensive. Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term "First Nations peoples" refers to the Indian peoples in Canada, both Status and non-Status. Some Indian peoples have also adopted the term "First Nation" to replace the word "band" in the name of their community. (Government of Canada. 2012)

Indian Act- This is a Canadian federal law that governs in matters pertaining to Indian status, bands, and Indian reserves. It authorizes the Canadian federal government to regulate and administer in the affairs and day-to-day lives of registered Indians and reserve communities.

Indigenous- Is a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants (Government of Canada. 2012)

In-service teachers- Teachers who are currently teaching within the BC education system.

Pre-Service teachers- Teachers who are teacher candidates within a teaching program, not yet practicing.

Potlatch- Also known as ‘Bahlats’ to the Carrier people. Indigenous people use this as a form of governance and to mark special life events. Witnesses are paid in the form of food and gifts to witness business at hand, such as births, deaths, name giving...etc. The word came from the chinook, meaning “to give” (Story of the Mask. 2003).

Reserve- Is a tract of land set aside under the Indian Act for the exclusive use of the Indian Band and its members. (Indigenous foundations. UBC. 2009)

Stellat'en- The people of the cape. Located West of Fraser Lake, BC. (Carrier Sekani Tribal Council 2011).